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ABSTRACT

This set of working papers concentrates on reading issues. This collection contains the following papers: "Literacy: The Needs of Teachers and Learners" (Christopher Brumfit); "Eight Lessons from Research into Literacy" (Henrietta Dombey); "'The Disqualified Half': Gender Representation in a Children's Reading Scheme" (Simon Williams); "Reading to Learn: Study Reading for All?" (Virginia Kelly); "Reading in a Foreign Language: A Self-Access Approach" (George Blue); "Reading and Communication in the Modern Languages Classroom" (Michael Grenfell); "Reading in French-GCSE to A Level" (Pat Rees); "POPS, PROPS, and FOPS: A New Way of Thinking About Readers' Response to Narrative" (Frank Myszor); "Reading Media Texts: Media, Imagination, and National Curriculum English" (Andrew Hart); and "Looking at Paintings: Representation and Response" (Michael Benton). (NAV)

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Perspectives on Reading

CLE

Working Papers

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Centre for Language in Education
1992

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Perspectives on Reading

Edited
by
George Blue

CLE Working Papers

2

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Contents

Page

Introduction
George Blue v

Literacy: The Needs of Teachers and Learners
Christopher Brumfit 1

Eight Lessons from Research into Literacy
Henrietta Dombey 12

"The Disqualified Half": Gender Representation in a Children's Reading Scheme
Simon Williams 28

Reading to Learn: Study Reading for All?
Virginia Kelly 43

Reading in a Foreign Language: A Self-Access Approach
George Blue 52

Reading and Communication in the Modern Languages Classroom
Michael Grenfell 64

Reading in French - GCSE to A Level
Pat Rees 78

POPS, PROPS and FOPS: A New Way of Thinking about Readers' Response to Narrative
Frank Myszor 99

Reading Media Texts: Media, Imagination and National Curriculum English
Andrew Hart 110

Looking at Paintings: Representation and Response
Michael Benton 128

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Introduction

Following the success of the first volume of CLE Working Papers, which was intended to reflect something of the range and breadth of the Centre's work, we decided that the next volume should be a thematic one. The topic that immediately sprang to mind was one that has been the subject of intense interest and debate recently and one to which members of CLE could contribute from a number of different perspectives: reading. This collection, like the last, represents work from staff in the University, students or ex-students, and other contributors to CLE activities.

The collection opens with Christopher Brumfit's investigation into the scope of literacy, showing how this concept may be defined differently by different communities and challenging a number of assumptions and oversimplifications. This theme is continued by Henrietta Dombey, who draws out a number of important lessons for anyone interested in children learning to read and write. Simon Williams then takes a look at a children's reading scheme to see whether male and female protagonists are equally represented.

Ginger Kelly's paper forms a kind of bridge between work with native speakers and teaching reading in a foreign language, as the study skills approach she describes for use with children with specific learning difficulties is very similar to some of the approaches described in the following three papers, all of which are concerned with learning to read in a foreign language. My own contribution investigates the potential of a self-access approach to developing foreign language reading skills, bearing in mind that both language skills and reading skills are involved here. Mike Grenfell relates work in the mother tongue teaching of reading to reading in a foreign language, particularly at GCSE level, and argues that reading activities should play a much more important role in the language classroom. Pat Rees investigates the place of reading in the experience of pupils who have taken GCSE and reports on a study of the difficult transition from GCSE to A Level.

In the last three papers we move from the role of literature in foreign languages back into mother tongue work, and investigate three different types of "reading", all from the point of view of reader-response. Frank

Myszor describes three kinds of prediction that young readers use in their approach to fiction. Andrew Hart extends the notion of "reading" to media texts, looking particularly at children's responses to television. Finally, Mike Benton makes the link between responding to literature and responding to paintings, showing many similarities between the processes by which readers and viewers create meaning.

All of the papers are offered in the hope that they will inform and enrich the debate on reading in its many different guises. The papers are not necessarily intended to be in polished or final form, and they certainly do not represent the last word on the subject. Comments will always be welcomed by the authors, as will suggestions for topics to be treated in further volumes of *CLE Working Papers*.

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Literacy: The Needs of Teachers and Learners

Christopher Brumfit

There are three main sectors in education which have been concerned with initial literacy, and in many ways it is confusing to group them all together because their problems vary. In countries where literacy is well established within the community, all primary school teachers are concerned with introducing reading and writing to young children. At the same time, teachers of adults are concerned with learners who are dissatisfied with the level of skill in these areas that they reached at school, and with those who have come from overseas countries where literacy is less widespread than here. In addition, literacy campaigns in some overseas countries have been concerned with attempts to reduce illiteracy in whole communities, attempts which have sometimes been accompanied by the establishment of written forms of languages that had hitherto operated satisfactorily solely on the basis of oral demands. Each of these situations demands different responses. At the same time, however, our general studies of literacy as a phenomenon spill over into each of these areas, and none of the assumptions underpinning work in one of these areas can be ignored by those working in the others, if only because people move to and fro. Teachers and learners move from society to society, so our boundaries are never impermeable and our categories are never watertight.

Over the past twenty years our views on the nature of literacy have changed considerably. Some of this change has been the result of clearer understanding of the psychological and linguistic processes underlying reading and writing; much of it, however, has resulted from the changing role of literacy in the world, and the increased awareness we now have of literacy as a social construct (Cook-Gumperz 1986). In this paper I propose to examine a number of key ideas which both teachers and learners need to understand if they are to make sense of their own - and others' - literacy. The specific means by which different people achieve understanding will of course vary from person to person and from situation to situation. But if the areas I discuss are fundamentally misunderstood, a great deal of time will be wasted, and unnecessary frustration and unhappiness will be caused.

In addition to discussion of these general matters of concern, I shall raise a number of questions resulting from what we do not understand about literacy, for we need to know what areas no-one knows about even more than we need to understand other people's relevant knowledge. Probably more harm results from being unaware of our ignorance than from failing to grasp what we do understand.

Literacy is not an absolute concept

There is not a reader of this paper who is not illiterate in some dialect or style of English. There may even be a number who have difficulty in translating the negatives in the previous sentence satisfactorily, and would have even more difficulty if they encountered the sentence in the spoken form. Illiteracy may be conceived of as a failure to realise one's ambitions in reading or in writing - but clearly what are considered appropriate ambitions will vary from situation to situation.

Yet the liberal position I have stated above is unsatisfactory from many people's point of view, even if it is the position that most literacy drives in rich countries end up by adopting. Parents ask whether their children have learnt to read in the same way they ask whether they have learnt to swim, and with a similar intention. The point with swimming is not that it should have been efficient, but that it should include the confidence to lift your feet off the ground and sink to your own level in the water. Until that has happened everything else is academic. In the same way basic word recognition does indeed mean something to parents: children who can confidently jump from print with common words that they know how to pronounce to recognition of the meaning of the word have made a qualitative leap which can be built upon. Without that leap, they are necessarily disfranchised from our print-ridden society.

But we only have to think a little about this view to recognise that it is not the whole story. Teachers who dismiss the opinions of parents because they argue along these lines are unhelpful, because there clearly is a qualitative leap of the kind described - yet most of the children, or adults, who effectively make that leap still fail to realise anything like their self-desired potential as readers and writers. "I can read" can be considered an absolute statement; "I can read satisfactorily" cannot.

Gudschinsky offers the following definition of literacy:

> That person is literate who, in a language he speaks, can read with understanding anything he would have understood if it had been spoken to him; and can write, so that it can be read, anything he can say. (Gudschinsky, 1976)

But while this may be an entirely adequate definition in purely technical terms, it cannot account for the structure of different discourses in speech and writing. If spoken monologue is performed for long enough, and technically enough, the hearers may long for the conventions of writing, where they can return to the text, re-read for clarification and make notes in the margin, rather than those of speech which, as Samuel Johnson remarked, "dies on the lips of the speaker".

The basic point is that literacy must in practice be related to the wishes and needs of the user. And we do different things with writing and speech. Functional literacy depends on the functions of language that are needed. And because these functions change (few road signs demand reading any more, but lorry drivers need to read multilingual customs instructions), a general capacity has to be available, capable of developing in a number of different directions. Literacy refers both to the general capacity and to the specific uses to which it is put, to the perceptual and linguistic competence, and to the communicative competence without which the ability to understand the symbols alone would be useless. "There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" (Hymes 1972).

What are the implications of this for teachers and learners? The major one is that no-one should imagine that being "literate" is a matter of passing one simply defined barrier. As with many other kinds of knowledge, it is the start of a journey, beginning a process which will necessarily continue for as long as the learner remains committed. Simple definitions are misleading and frustrating.

Literacy is socially defined

Jonathan Miller once commented on the fact that the term "patient" is a self-definition. It refers to people who have decided that their condition is such as to need treatment. We all carry illnesses with us all the time, but only at certain times do we decide that without treatment we cannot continue - and the conditions for defining patienthood are partly determined by social views of acceptable or unacceptable behaviour (are we "patients" when we have a cold?) or of the seriousness of particular conditions (should stomach pains justify the removal of an appendix?). "Literacy is a similar term: we define ourselves as either literate or illiterate, and how we do this is partly determined by the social norms of the group within which we live.

One problem which this poses is that, as social expectations increase, so the minimum requirements for adequate literacy are redefined upwards, and the number of "illiterates" increases as people become left below the redefined boundary, a point which Crystal (1986) has emphasised. Literacy relates to educational expectations, and follows desires for school-leaving certificates, professional qualifications, degrees, and so on. It is one of the markers of social adequacy, a sign of having joined the group of the reasonably competent in the world.

In this way the notion of literacy becomes norm-referenced, and the criterion used by Gudschinsky in the quotation already referred to becomes irrelevant: "you are illiterate" becomes a statement not about your ability to respond to print, but about your outsiderness.

The implications of this for teachers are that learners cannot be seen independently of the social context within which they operate. Expectations of the local community, parental attitudes, the model of language use presented by peers and by teachers themselves - all these become major factors in determining the attitudes of language learners.

For learners the implication is primarily that they should recognise the influence of the social group in which they live as unavoidable, and as one contributory factor to their expectations of literacy. If they see themselves as solely and uniquely responsible for a failure to achieve what they aspire to, the task of self-improvement will be far more difficult than if they recognise themselves as part of a culture with certain expectations that they may well wish to move outside of.

Literacy is collaborative

The previous comments have indicated that there is a social basis to literacy. In practice, as experienced teachers know well, learning to read and improving reading practices is frequently best addressed through collaborative projects. Children read best when they have been read to, when they have seen their parents and older brothers and sisters reading, and when they are part of a genuine reading community (see Wells 1985). So too do learners in school, as many experienced teachers report (e.g. Meek 1982).

There is a fundamental reason for this. Effective teaching develops when the purposes of what is being taught are clearly perceived. The establishment of a reading community demonstrates in living practice many of the purposes of written language. Reading for imaginative response and to obtain information, to follow arguments and to share others' experience follows naturally from project work and class activity that is closely related to complex purposes with many different roles for learners to perform. If reading is simply the meaningless performance of a classroom routine, accepting reading is simply a sign of being docile and unquestioning and the creative and intelligent are more likely to be the ones most alienated. To appreciate the value of a literate society you must live with a literate society, at close quarters.

Literacy needs imagination

It is very easy to define the language needs of adults in a highly utilitarian way. Society demands the comprehension of forms, notices, instructions and signs: it is indeed true to claim that someone who cannot understand these is placed at a major disadvantage in social life.

Yet there are coping strategies: as long as each family has access to some individual who can deal with legally required writing, as long as you intelligently follow the crowd and adopt the practices of the majority, you will not go far wrong. Nobody learns to read and write simply to cope: somewhere along the line they need to have felt a personal desire for written language, because it does something for them, for this individual person. And the ways in which each person identifies with written or spoken language differ from context to context, as Heath, among others, has shown with great care in her study of two communities in the United States (Heath 1983).

To say that literacy requires imagination may simply be to restate what was said earlier, that reading must be for pleasure as well as for utility. But it could be a great deal more than this. We can engage imaginatively with a story, but we also engage imaginatively with arguments, with the accumulation of facts, with almost any human activity, because the process of committed engagement requires a response which is divergent, personal, making connections that have not previously occurred to others, in short, imagination. As Frank Smith has written, "Thought in its broadest sense is the construction of worlds, both 'real' and imaginary, learning is their elaboration and modification, and language - especially written language - is a particularly efficacious but by no means unique medium by which these worlds can be manifested, manipulated, and sometimes shared" (Smith 1985:197). It is not the messages, in the narrow sense of information, that language carries that are important (indeed as a means of simply conveying information language is relatively inefficient), but the structure of possible worlds, of schemata, of scenarios, of woven fabrics interpreting our varied experiences in pictures which are meaningful but necessarily personal, yet clear enough to be responded to by others. Without engagement of this kind, the role of language, and especially of written language, will always remain trivial and not worth exploring in any depth.

Spoken and written language perform equally necessary functions

The relationship between speech and writing is complex, and we no longer accept the somewhat simplistic view of early twentieth century linguistics that writing in some way "reflects" speech. Very recent work (e.g. Tannen 1982) suggests that the structures of speech and writing are dependent on what the purpose of the interaction is rather than on which of the two modes is being used. Writing is typically more decontextualised, but speech may also be decontextualised in formal settings, and the apparent "completeness" of the written mode, without relying on paralinguistic features for maintaining discourse, as conversation does, is a function of the purpose of much writing - to argue a case, to inform, etc. - rather than of writing in itself. Where writing has more affective purposes, and where the technology allows it, paralinguistic devices in layout, typography and the use of other visual devices such as pictures may be frequent.

But writing does still lack adaptability, and this is the fundamental difference from speech. Effective literacy must depend on the ability to play in one's mind round an apparently unreceptive text (or other visual presentation) in order to reclaim the most probable picture or message it conveys. Doing this requires readers and writers to see such activity as necessary - hence writing and speech must be seen as complementary, each serving different functions in different contexts. To see the task as simply one of transferring what can be done in one mode to the other is to confuse the social roles of the two.

What we do not understand

There is a risk that we end up like the centipede, unable to put a foot forward because we are thinking so hard about the process of walking. I have heard impatient teachers object to discussion which persistently raises problems by saying that "we should simply get on and do what needs to be done, without thinking too much". It is easy to be too dismissive of this view. There is a great deal that can be done without over-much thought, and many of the tasks are too urgent to be sophisticated about. But to accept this view for too many people, too much of the time, plays into the hands of those who wish to administer a complex educational system as if there are no real complexities to address. When that happens, people who do not neatly fit the mould, either as the numerical majority or as part of the conventional pattern of aspiration, become marginalised and exploited. The social, political and moral effects of this for all of us may be disastrous; so we have a responsibility to look closely at some of the difficulties, at least.

Cook-Gumperz writes (1986: 14)

> Inherent in our contemporary attitude to literacy and schooling is a confusion between a prescriptive view of literacy, as a statement about the values and uses of knowledge, and a descriptive view of literacy, as cognitive abilities which are promoted and assessed through schooling. This latter, instrumental notion of literacy as a standardised set of basic cognitive skills is embedded in the selection and evaluation criteria that are central to schooling.

If we are to treat seriously the concern for literacy as a social construct that underlies the argument of this paper (and which any commentator would I think acknowledge to be the major clarification of the last twenty years of research), we must consider the implications for education of the conflict that Cook-Gumperz describes. For example, the proposals for testing of language development that are embedded in the National Curriculum appear to simply mirror the proposals for testing incorporated in other areas of the curriculum. But not only is language contextualised in a literal sense, but it is incorporated in a literal sense too, for it lies within each of us, essential to our self, our identity and our perception of our membership of different social groups. The extent to which this is true more for language than for other areas of the curriculum is enough to justify the claim that language is qualitatively different from other areas of the curriculum. Apart from anything else, spoken language will develop even if it is not part of the curriculum - this is only marginally true of other work, which is much more dependent for its very existence on the process of formal teaching.

But we can take this further. We have seen some of the complexities in the relationships between spoken and written language. Literacy is no longer as unnatural as it appeared to be even a few years ago, and it will become less and less unnatural as education becomes more widespread internationally. Different societies accommodate literacy in different ways. The key question for the next few years, it seems to me, is the relationship between the social adoption of literate norms by different social groups and the schematic definition of literacy imposed, probably inevitably, by state education.

This should not be seen as some sort of deschooling attack on education. I can conceive of no realistic alternative to a formal educational system, and the most attractive propositions of anarchism have always seemed to me to lack any possibility of practical realisation, either in education or in government. But the potentially centralising effects of a state system of education need to be guarded against and mitigated if the system is not to be blamed for failures which are inherent in insensitive state control. And we cannot guard against something we cannot understand. If there are going to be national tests of literacy, by any definition, for any purpose, it is essential that we examine the relationships between cultural groups and their uses of literacy. What are the norms of literacy expected in different groups of society? What are the uses made of literacy by those who are defined as illiterate, whether by others or by themselves? How much of the discussion of the effects of literacy in the past was actually discussion of the effects of formal schooling, or of an increasing formalisation of serious oral discourse (see Gee 1986 for a very interesting discussion of this issue, and also Scribner and Cole's (1981) work in Liberia). So much of what has been examined by researchers has implications for the diversity of "normal" societies, but has been based on bilingual or rapidly changing societies. We need to ask the same questions here for monolingual, apparently homogeneous groups.

Why do we need to ask such questions? Because the European educational systems grew up before education was widely studied as a phenomenon, and because many of the fundamental questions raised in research of the last twenty years have arisen from work in the urgent situations of third world countries or of migrant education in industrialised countries. Yet what has been revealed time and time again is that the old homogeneity never existed, that education is still tied to the nineteenth century nationalist view of the monolithic nation state (a potent myth and arguably a necessary one, but still a myth!). It is time for the older educational systems to benefit from our understanding of the younger ones, for if they do not, they will surely fail to meet the challenges of the next few years. Ignorance of how the system works is never a good recipe for advances in policy. (The beginnings of work of this kind could be seen in, for example, Chapter 5 of Gubb, Gorman and Price 1987, and potentially in the whole international study of which their report is a part.)

So the different sectors I commented on at the beginning of this paper have much to contribute to each other. The most interesting work in literacy has concentrated on the third world, and some adult work, but its implications for understanding normal literacy are considerable. Indeed, if we fail to understand the relationships between the structure of literacy in different social groups, we risk being unable to interpret the results of the monitoring of literacy, being unable to adapt teaching strategies to the needs of learners, and consequently being unable to provide basic education at all. In today's society there are different kinds of literacies: tests of illiteracy will fail to address our greatest problems unless they are related to a far fuller understanding than is currently available. Yet the tools are there, the models of research are there, and many of the initial insights are already available in the literature that has been referred to. Neither governments nor educationists can afford to advance in ignorance.

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Eight Lessons from Research into Literacy

Henrietta Dombey, Department of Primary Education, Brighton Polytechnic

(This paper formed the basis of a talk to the Centre for Language in Education on 1 June 1991.)

This paper sets out some of the research evidence on which our practice and recommendations on the teaching of reading are based. It is not by any means comprehensive, but gives an indication of the wealth and complexity of research into reading and related areas in recent years. It is grouped into eight sections: eight lessons on reading and the teaching of reading.

1. Readers engage in a complex, multi-level process, involving knowledge of sound-symbol relations, spelling patterns, vocabulary, sentence structures, propositional meanings, and realms of meaning beyond individual propositions.

1a The strategies adults use in tackling print

We know much more than we did about what readers do when they read. As Smith and Rumelhart have shown, effective reading is not the orderly, sequential, bottom-up process that commonsense would suggest (Smith 1971; Rumelhart 1976). Over a century ago Cattell's ingenious experiments revealed the speed of adults' perception of letters and words to be far greater when these are presented in coherent text, than when they are displayed in random order (Cattell 1886). We actually perceive letter shapes more quickly when our knowledge of language and the subject matter gives us some notion of what we might expect.

Smith would have us replace the conventional but discredited bottom-up model, in which we proceed from part to whole, from individual letter via progressive accumulation to propositional meaning and beyond, with a top-down model, in which hypothesis-construction at the level of meaning guides a search for lower level information. We find more persuasive Rumelhart's idea of simultaneous, multi-level, interactive processing. According to this, at one and the same time, information at any one of the linguistic levels can prompt us to make hypotheses about features at any of the others. Simultaneously these hypotheses operate top-down and bottom-up. As we read a text, a particular detective story perhaps, the wider context - the language and events of the preceding chapters - gives us a general expectation about the kind of events that might unfold in this chapter, and the kind of language through which they will be realised. So far, top-down. But such top-down prediction cannot generate, except in the most unusual circumstances, precisely worded sentences, or even particular meanings. We read on to find out, precisely because we don't know.

So as we carry these general expectations in our head, we are also simultaneously noting letters and words, with little precise expectation (other than our knowledge of language and spelling patterns) to guide this process, certainly in the opening phrases of a new chapter. Thus we find ourselves making hypotheses in two directions: downward from context to events and all the other features of narrative that make us want to read it, and upward from letters to words, and words to sentences and the meanings they realise. Where there is agreement between these various hypotheses, we proceed in our reading. Where there is not, where, for example, we read that a character has suffered greatly from the consequences of a fire, and find this hard to understand in the light of what we know of his prudence in matters of insurance, we go back over the relevant words, both inspecting the letters carefully and also reviewing what we have learnt from the preceding text, until, on noting that the word is actually "fine", we are satisfied that we can achieve consistency between what we see on the page and what we are building in our heads.

Ib The strategies young children use in tackling print

It is not only skilled adults who read in such complex ways. We also know, thanks to the work of Yetta Goodman and Marie Clay, that unless we succeed in training them otherwise, young children go about the process of reading in much the same way as we do, bringing their expectations of what the text might say to the business of identifying the words on the page (Goodman Y 1976, 1990; Goodman et al. 1987; Clay 1972, 1982). These are the practices still dismissed as unhelpful "guessing" by those advocates of the commonsense approach to the teaching of reading that is given the hospitality of the mass media. But close observation of what skilled readers and novice learners do is likely to be a better guide to how reading should be taught than uninformed and unreflecting "commonsense".

Deviations from the printed text are not all negative. The child who reads "said he" where the text says "he said", and "home" where the text says "house" is revealing that sound semantic processing is at work, and also in the first instance, that she has mastered something of the patterning of written language.

Of course we know that inexperienced child readers use such context cues with less skill and refinement than we do, and are much less adept than we are at combining the information they yield with the information provided by the letters on the page. We want to emphasize that no one set of cues is enough: if they are to learn to do what we do, children need to learn to make effective use of picture cues, semantic cues, syntactic cues and grapho-phonemic cues, and to use them in simultaneous combination.

2. Literacy learning is not to be simply and straightforwardly equated with teaching in school:

2a Children learn many powerful literacy lessons before they come to school.

Taking out of school learning first, we can say that we now know that children arrive at school at five or six having already learned many valuable literacy lessons. Rather more than twenty years ago, Dolores Durkin showed that a significant proportion of the six year olds starting first grade in Oakland, California (a community much less well off than San Francisco across the bay) could already read at second grade level or higher (Durkin 1966). Interestingly these tended to be the children of blue collar workers rather than the middle classes who followed the educators' advice and left literacy teaching to the schools. Another study in New York City showed that far from disabling the children as educators had argued, this "precocity" in reading gave them an educational advantage which persisted throughout their elementary schooling, and presumably beyond (ibid).

A few years later, Margaret Clark's work in Scotland showed that a number of British children could also read when they started school, even though this is of course at least a year earlier than first grade in the United States (Clark 1976). However, here too the profession was unwelcoming. Indeed the parents and children in her study often felt this proficiency should be kept an embarrassing secret, like bed-wetting. This at least has changed: in British reception classes today, early competence in reading is more likely to be recognised and welcomed.

But it is not just the high-achieving few who learn literacy lessons outside school. As a teacher on one of our in-service courses discovered, early literacy learning can start in the most apparently inauspicious circumstances. Three year old children on bleak Brighton Council estates can tell a telephone book from a recipe book, and know what is the purpose of each. They know where it says "Coffee" on the jar and can "read" the McDonald's sign.

The children who walk into our reception classes in September come to school having witnessed and participated in many "literacy events" to use Heath's term (Heath 1983). They know something of the purposes of literacy and something of its forms. They have even begun to control some of these and put them to use for their own purposes. As in so much else, where literacy is concerned children come to school neither empty vessels nor *tabulae rasae*.

Some children, mainly but not exclusively from middle-class homes, come to school having learned even more substantial literacy lessons. In his meticulous study of 128 Bristol children before and during their early years at school, Gordon Wells found that hearing stories read aloud was the single most powerful factor contributing to children's subsequent success in learning to read (Wells 1981a). The quality of the spoken language in which they were involved, the extent to which they played at writing and joined in such family writing activities as making out the shopping list were also important. But none was as important as listening to stories. Wells' research design did not readily yield this finding, since it was based on the taping of randomly selected 90 second bursts of talk by means of a radio microphone, and so eliminated much story-telling activity, in particular the bed-time story told after the radio microphone had been taken off. But the snatches of day-time stories, read in time stolen from the domestic round, were enough to establish the association between hearing stories read at home and subsequent success in learning to read at school.

My own research shows something of the power and complexity of what goes on in the reading of bed-time stories to pre-schoolers (Dombey 1984). As their parents turn the pages, talk about the pictures and tell the sometimes familiar and sometimes new words of the text, the listening children are learning to make sense of what they hear - language detached from the here and now of the bedroom, language patterned over long stretches in coherent stories, connected and explicit monologues very different from the fragmented to and fro of conversation. They learn to relate the events, characters and settings of the pictures they are looking at and the words they are hearing, to experiences they have had, or have heard about or have encountered in other texts. The listening children become increasingly capable of making such connections for themselves, bringing richness to their reading and greater significance to their lives. At the same time they are also internalising the linguistic forms through which the stories and rhymes are realised.

But how does this contribute to the business of learning to read? Children who have listened to stories with pleasure and a growing sense of power can predict what may happen in the texts from which they are learning to read, and can predict much of the language that will make it happen. Of course it helps if the story is of a familiar sort - has something of the allure, is told through language in some way similar and delivers something of the satisfaction that the child is used to from the books that have come to mean so much at home. But even if the text in front of her is of that bizarre and often unsatisfying variety, the reading scheme book, where the resonant phrases are few and the semantic rewards are sparse, the child who has learned the language of books at home is likely to make an efficient job of learning this new kind of language. And as Clark showed in 1972, she can also put to use lessons learned about such crucial matters as following the lines and page turning.

Furthermore we now know, notably from Carol Fox's work, that children who have taken in a rich diet of stories and made these their own, can produce, at four and five, their own stories of marvellous, controlled complexity (Fox 1985).

If as teachers we are going to build on what children bring to school, we need to have a clear idea of what that is. If we are (quite rightly) to be held to account for what children learn when they are in school, we must know, and be able to tell others, where they were at the start. We must know what they have learned, with their parents and others, in the years before school.

2b Particularly where they are encouraged to do so, parents can continue to help their children develop their literacy after they have started school.

We know the parental contribution to literacy learning does not stop at five. Morris found the beneficial effect of parental support for children experiencing difficulty in learning to read (Morris 1966). Hewison and Tizard found parental involvement similarly effective on the reading of children at all levels of competence, and from social backgrounds including those not usually seen in this light (Hewison and Tizard 1980). Their findings have been repeated in formal and informal projects all over the UK, in inner city and leafy suburb (Topping and Wolfendale 1985). Wherever teachers have prepared the ground carefully, organized the project thoughtfully and carried it out thoroughly, schemes involving parents in helping children's reading on a daily basis have helped children become more competent, more confident and more committed as readers.

3. Literacy learning is an active process, driven and shaped by the learner's intentions.

Behaviourism has certainly had its day as the explanation for how children do their most significant learning. Of course we have known for a long time that children are not just passive recipients of teaching, shaped by the processes of reinforcement. Piaget taught us long ago that children are active theorisers, and our observations of them in and out of school daily confirm this (Piaget 1959). But it was their encounters with the physical world that Piaget saw to provide children with the experience that leads to more complex and adequate theories: he held language, and indeed adult mediation, to be of little importance to this process. However, in his quite extraordinarily wide-ranging and powerful work, Vygotsky demonstrated the way in which children use their language to transform thought (Vygotsky 1962). He also showed us that language learning is, like all learning, intensely social (Vygotsky 1978). Again, observation of children talking and listening in and out of school confirms this view.

From a linguistic perspective, more than thirty years ago, Chomsky showed the inadequacy of behaviourism as an explanation of language learning, and argued irrefutably that children learn language through making and testing hypotheses about how it works, against the evidence of the language that surrounds them (Chomsky 1959). Commonplace childish errors such as "I seed three sheeps" show this linguistic theorising at work. Halliday has since shown us that children do not engage in this process for its own intellectual sake, but do so in order to make the world more meaningful (Halliday 1975). Children extend their mastery of linguistic forms to expand their control of the physical and human world around them.

These lessons on the nature, power and origins of language have transformed the psychology of learning. Bruner has taught us that children's intentions are articulated, shaped and consolidated through language more powerfully than through any other mode of representation, and that these intentions shape all their learning (Bruner 1968). Children learn in order to make the world a more predictable and controllable place.

In this changed intellectual climate, teachers in the US, Canada, New Zealand and many other countries have found out that children learn best to read and write when their intentions are aroused and enlisted, when they learn what reading and writing can do for them, what literacy can help them be and become (Goodman et al. 1980; Smith 1983; Harste, Woodward and Burke 1984; Goodman 1986; Hall 1989).

4. Literacy learning operates most characteristically on a number of different linguistic levels simultaneously: it is not made easier by being broken down into apparently simpler elements, which are then taught separately.

When children are engaged in learning complex skills, such as learning language or learning literacy, we know now that they learn in complex ways. Over the last three decades, work on language acquisition has greatly expanded from the study of phonology and lexis. Inspired by Chomsky, the sixties saw studies of children's acquisition of syntax, the system that vastly increases the power of their phonology and lexis (Chomsky 1965, McNeill 1970). Halliday revealed the semantic development that both shapes and is realized through children's syntactic development (Halliday 1975). More recent studies have explored the roles children learn to play in the social relations that both frame and are framed by the potential for meaning that language makes available to them (Wells 1981b).

But there is no neat sequence in this learning. Children learn to master the phonology, lexis, syntax and complex rules of what can be said on what occasion, all at the same time, with negligible amounts of direct teaching (Garvey 1984; Tizard and Hughes 1984). Children do not learn their oral language piece by decontextualised piece.

As to learning the language of the written word, as my own research has shown, when children are read stories that engage their interest, complex language learning - of words, verb forms, phrase structures and sentence structures - goes on simultaneously and largely unconsciously as the child is focussing on the characters and what they are doing, and pondering the consequences and reasons for their actions (Dombey 1984). Sometimes the attention shifts to the more mechanical aspects of reading as the child asks "Where are we now?", or takes pleasure in recognising a particular word, and the sense of growing independence this brings.

Work on reading and writing in school has shown similar complexity, as children learn to relate spoken sound to written sign, to spell or recognise whole words, to predict or compose sentence structures of written language and to construe or construct whole stories, all at the same time (Gollasch 1977; Calkins 1983; Harste, Woodward and Burke 1984). Indeed we are learning that to detach one element from the whole and teach it, may make it harder for children to learn, and may make children likely to underperform.

5. Children vary in the amount of direct literacy teaching they need, but all children do much of their literacy learning tacitly, implicitly.

Where reading is concerned, Berdiansky, Cronell and Koehler showed that the variety of word patterns recognised by nine year olds in Texas demonstrates that they have, on average, learned 166 rules of sound-symbol correspondence and 45 exceptions (Berdiansky, Cronell and Koehler 1969). No teacher would claim to have directly taught all these correspondences. But we all know from our own experience that many children need some direct teaching if they are to learn all these rules. However, children vary markedly in the amount of direct teaching they need. Some need much more help than others in putting the grapho-phonemic cueing system to work in their reading. Through studies of large numbers of children, Bradley and Bryant have taught us that raising their "phonological awareness", their awareness of speech sounds, can make a significant difference to the subsequent fluency and independence of children's reading (Bradley and Bryant 1983).

All children need to learn the complex phoneme-grapheme relationships of the English writing system. In the early stages of school literacy learning, large populations of children appear to benefit from such activities as playing "I spy", learning nursery rhymes by heart and sharing tongue-twisters, through which they are helped to see that spoken words are made up of sequences of separable sounds. But beyond this, it is not clear which children need how much direct teaching, either in recognising letter patterns as they read, or in reconstructing them as they write. We need to develop subtler ways of assessing, to ensure that teaching of this sort goes to the children who need it at the time when they can profit from it and not to those who do not need it or who are not yet ready to profit from

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it. Certainly class lessons in phonic blending do not seem to have a beneficial influence on the fluency, accuracy or comprehension of all children, or even of most (Bussis et al. 1985).

6. There are many important literacy lessons that only powerful texts can teach.

Margaret Meek has shown us some of the subtle and compelling lessons of narrative (Meek 1988a). Among others, it can teach that although the text is unchanging, every time it is read it can yield something more; that stories can touch children's deepest and most urgent desires; how language can variously realise intentions; that the reader can conspire with the author to mean more than the text actually says; and how metaphor can help us make new meanings. Children need to encounter texts that will teach these lessons, not just through the teacher's reading aloud, but through their daily engagement with texts that invite personal exploration and speculation, that juxtapose words and pictures necessitating an active reading, one that can be shared, extended and contested. This thinking is reflected in the prose of the Cox Report, in the contents of the Programmes of Study, and in some of the Statements of Attainment, such as 2.3d: "find and appreciate meanings beyond the literal" (DES and the Welsh Office 1989).

7. Literacy is laden with the values of the social context which both surrounds it and is shaped by it.

As you may have noticed, we have tended to refer to "children" rather than "the child". Children are various. Some of that variety is to do with different styles of learning. The work of Bussis et al. has shown how strongly rooted and pervasive these differences are, and how important it is for teachers to take account of them, to work with the grain of children's learning styles, not against it (Bussis et al. 1985). But much of children's variety is to do with the different social worlds which they inhabit. Studies in recent years have made us more aware that children bring to school different experiences and expectations of literacy, and the differences are in kind not just in degree. Heath's work in particular has shown us just how significant such differences can be (Heath 1983). The literacy lessons children learn in fundamentalist church services differ from those learned in the corner shop or the DSS office. The lessons learned at home also vary markedly between social groups. There are very many ways of looking at a picture book with a young child, ways that are shaped by the parents' experiences and expectations of literacy. Literacy is not a value-free technology or skill.

As adults do, children engage in literacy activities shot through with cultural and social significance. The techniques, the mechanical aspects, are embedded in language; meanings and values inhere in that language and in the situations in which literacy is put to use. Every text carries a social message and implies a social world. Unless we present children with texts that enhance their views of themselves, the world and its possibilities, we risk that a number will size up this arduous activity and decide that indeed it is not worth the effort.

Those who come from socially marginalised groups, the long-term unemployed, travellers, refugees uncertain where and how they will ever settle or how much of their culture they will be able to cling to, are all likely to see little in literacy for themselves or their children. In the words of an articulate non-reader from an Arabic speaking home in Paris "Pourquoi lire quand on n'a plus de raison de le faire?" (Biarnes 1990).

Children in such situations are in particular need of texts that invite and reward them, and add to their sense of the world as a hospitable and controllable place.

8. There is no substitute for watching how, when, where and why children go about the business of reading and writing, and responding to the efforts of adults to help them.

In their different ways, Marie Clay and Yetta Goodman have taught us the value of subtle, informed observation, kid-watching as Yetta Goodman calls it (Clay 1972, 1982; Goodman 1976, 1990). This is the instrument that has led us to so many of our understandings about children's literacy learning. But it is not just a research instrument, to be used by outsiders coming into the classroom for their own purposes. The formative assessment it permits is essential to teaching that engages children at the most

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appropriate level, in the most appropriate way. Unless you know where children are, what they have done, what they can do, how they go about it, what they think of what they can do, what they want to do next and what they find difficult but can do with your help (Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development") you risk expecting too much of them, under-challenging them, or taking them along too narrow or alien a path. The *Primary Language Record* is a superb demonstration of how teachers can be helped to organize and formalise this kid-watching in ways that focus it productively on the future and make assessment an eminently collaborative and communicable enterprise. It demands much of teachers, but those who stick with it declare that it significantly improves their teaching, and makes them more fully professional (Bussis et al 1985).

Implications

As we have outlined, we have learned many things in the past twenty years or so. To recap briefly, we have learned that skilled, experienced readers engage in a highly complex multi-level process. We have learned that much literacy learning takes place out of school, and that wherever it takes place, it is active, driven and shaped by the learner's intentions. It is also highly complex, operating on many levels, often simultaneously. We have learned too that all children do much of their literacy learning tacitly, as they strive to make meaning through their reading and writing, but children vary in the amount of direct literacy teaching they need. Good texts are crucial: many important reading lessons can be taught only by reading powerful texts. All manifestations of literacy carry a cultural freight: reading and writing are not neutral technical skills, but shape and are also shaped by the social context, the culture of which they form a part. And we have learned that if we want to know what children can do, there is no substitute for watching carefully how, when and why children go about the business of reading and writing.

To be effective in giving children access to the sort of skilled literacy that they will need in their lives ahead, our teaching needs to be built on the solid foundations of research knowledge of the sort we have outlined.

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"The Disqualified Half": Gender Representation in a Children's Reading Scheme

Simon Williams

I first became interested in the representation of gender in children's reading schemes when looking for alternative texts to use in a pragmatic oral test. From various other published schemes, my investigations led me to *Story Chest* with its wide selection of readers and mix of fiction and non-fiction. It was only after spending two half days reading through the material that I realised how few women appeared in the texts. When they did it was often as witches, princesses, old women or housewives; apart from being somebody's sister, there were comparatively few girls. I decided to investigate their absence and its implications further.

In the first part of the paper, I will contrast two theoretical approaches to the issue of gender and language, focusing on one particular critique of gender representation in school reading materials. In the second part of the paper, I will present an analysis of gender representation in the *Story Chest* reading scheme, and suggest remedies which might also be applied to other schemes.

How far does the representation of gender in school materials help to create inequality and how far is it simply a mirror of society? Different theoretical approaches to this issue imply different answers. Cameron (1985) contrasts two such approaches: structuralist and determinist.

A pre-suffragette example of determinism is Mill's (1869) essay on "The Subjugation of Women":

> When we consider the positive evil caused to the disqualified half of the human race by their disqualification - first in the loss of the most inspiriting and elevating kind of personal enjoyment, and next in the weariness, disappointment, and profound dissatisfaction with life, which are so often the substitute for it; one feels that among all the lessons which men require for carrying on the struggle against the inevitable imperfections of their lot on earth, there is no lesson which

> they more need, than to add to the evils which nature inflicts, by their jealous and prejudiced restrictions on one another. Their vain fears only substitute other and worse evils for those which they are idly apprehensive of: while every restraint on the freedom of conduct of any of their human fellow creatures, (otherwise than by making them responsible for any evil actually caused by it), dries up *pro tanto* the principal fountain of human happiness, and leaves the species less rich, to an inappreciable degree, in all that makes life valuable to the individual human being. (in Robson 1984: 340)

Mill identifies men as the source of the "positive evil" without analyzing the particular social structures through which their power is perpetuated.

Linguistic determinists would say that changes in language affect social relations rather than *vice versa*. Cameron traces this theory to Lacan (and hence Saussure), Whorf and Sapir: the idea that language determines perception and thus reality - that "linguistic differences [determine] differences in world view" - is the basis of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Cameron 1985: 97). Spender (1980) takes this argument to its logical conclusion when she asserts that English is a man-made language (Spender 1980: 12).

A structuralist explanation for unequal representation of gender is offered by Hammond (1990), who suggests that as a species we are driven by "affective maximisation", or an inbuilt need for dependable, long-term affective gratification. In order to achieve this we have created stratification systems in which gender plays a vital role. Increasing social complexity reduces the need for some traditional forms of differentiation: in economically less advanced societies the gender behaviour of men and women is often sharply differentiated, eg in the extent to which a woman covers her body. A man's honour may be measured by the modesty of his wife or wives. Economically more advanced societies, on the other hand, provide the complexity by which gender becomes less important as a means of differentiation, affective maximisation being spread more widely and thinly. Both Karl Popper (1972) and George Kelly (1955) have a constructivist view of the nature of representation. For them, empirical observations can only be made in the context of an existing theory: what is represented can only be understood through a theoretical paradigm rather than experience. New knowledge depends not on recognising that something is new but on the ability to create a new hypothesis which can include a new observation (see Mancini and Semerari 1988: 69-79). Thus, denying young readers the chance to evoke and identify with (especially) young female protagonists makes it difficult for them to form the concept that women can take initiatives, act assertively and lead lives independent of men. Without this concept, real instances which children, and later adults, may come across of women behaving like this may go unrecognised or be dismissed as exceptional. When, eventually, boys are forced to confront such instances, they may deny them, experience shock and then get angry.

Education is one area in which theorists and practitioners are assumed to be more aware and better informed on such issues. Careful thought goes into the preparation of classroom materials and teaching methodology; both are to a greater or lesser extent the result of original research. Yet, as the Anti-sexist working party (1985) points out, many books and resources are sexist in content and illustration, thus reinforcing stereotypes; furthermore, by the time children come to school they have already acquired a set of attitudes and expectations about what girls and boys can do (Anti-sexist working party 1985: 136). Perhaps neither of these observations need be surprising. Freud (1977) has written extensively on the very early psychosexual development of children; Illich (1971) has described schools as institutions of social control and has documented examples of their hidden agenda. Illich's thesis also offers the possibility of using education to effect change in what is often thought to be social rather than biological behaviour. How have the last two decades of increased gender awareness addressed these issues?

The content of education as measured by textbooks and other commercially-produced material still appears to be male, white dominated. Clarricoates (1987) refers to

> ... the school-book world with its sexist implications [which] reveals the implausible statistical ratio of twice as many boys than (sic) girls

> and seven times as many men than women, who are also predominantly white and middle class. (Clarricoates 1987: 157)

Mahony (1985) reminds us of the many studies carried out on a range of children's literature. Three-quarters of the texts and pictures were found to contain the characters and images of boys and men, one-quarter girls and women. Men were depicted in four times as many occupations as women and expressed themes of achievement and ingenuity; women and girls expressed dependence and nurturance (Mahony 1985: 11). In recognition of the problem, the Schools Council Project Reducing Sex Differentiation in Schools 1981-1983 chose as part of its work to investigate sex bias in reading schemes, textbooks and teaching resources (Millman and Weiner 1985: 17).

Gilbert (1989) lists six research papers on reading materials in infant and secondary schools which have consistently pointed to (1) the different consideration girls and boys receive in such texts; (2) the paucity of adult female role models; (3) the stereotyping of female/male behaviours and activities. Gilbert cites these, together with documentation on classroom interaction, as evidence that language practices contribute to the construction of young women as a dominated and oppressed classroom group (Gilbert 1989: 257). She notes that

> Many of the texts girls read and write in classrooms serve to perpetuate, rather than challenge, patriarchal subject positioning of women. ... [They] encourage the construction of stereotypical female subject positions which limit women's understanding of their textual inscription and encourage them to see such inscription as "natural" and "normal". (Gilbert 1989: 263)

To remedy this situation, she suggests a number of techniques "which focus attention on language practices as socially constructed rather than personally expressed" (ibid):

1 genre theory coupled with a semiotic analysis of the constructed nature of genres to challenge the "naturalness" of language and language learning

2 feminist literary theory/feminist aesthetics, which have exposed the literary canon as "an arbitrary, phallocentric selection of material"

3 language and subjectivity: positions are learned as the result of taking up particular (gendered) positions in discourse - assertive, self-sacrificing etc.

Ord and Quigley (1985) advocate a similar commitment to open discussion in the classroom. Pupils should examine:

1 how many of the books are written by women

2 how many have women or girls as their main characters

3 how many contain examples of positive, well-balanced relationships between boys and girls

4 how mothers and fathers are portrayed.

They also suggest looking at particular books in detail and focusing on a book from the position of the female characters (Ord and Quigley 1985: 116). In principle, the solutions offered by Ord and Quigley and Gilbert may be possible as one-off lessons using a class reader, though it is hard to imagine Gilbert's being appropriate at primary school level; focusing on a specific text in this way is also more problematic with a reading scheme in which children are using different books.

Even when children are exposed to the possibility that girls can be proactive, assertive and independent, they may be unable to comprehend the situation. An interesting example of this is reported by Davies (1989) in the reaction of some pre-school children to a telling of *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch 1982). In their hearing of the story, the princess Elizabeth loses her prince not because she chooses to leave him (which she does) but because she is lacking virtue: "Most children believed Elizabeth should have cleaned herself up and then married the prince". Elizabeth thus becomes a "normal" princess who just got things a bit wrong (Davies 1989: 231).

It might be argued from this and other teachers' own experience, that girls do not mind reading stories in which boys are the main characters as much as boys mind when girls take this role. Clarricoates (1987) refers to an interview with a primary school teacher:

> You can choose a subject interesting to the boys, the girls would be interested just as well, something like transport. But the other way around you often find boys are not very interested if it's not directed at them ... (Clarricoates 1987: 158)

It seems that this tendency for boys to prefer gender differentiation in children's books and class topics can be observed in more general behaviour. Barbara Lloyd (1989) reports that in two studies girls did not choose to use toys to mark their gender identities whereas boys avoided feminine toys and employed masculine toys to mark their membership of a gender category (Lloyd 1989: 62). However, as Lloyd points out, patterns of gender behaviour, action and feeling which may be confined to one gender are not necessarily biologically determined (Lloyd 1989: 61) and therefore the implication is that they are capable of change.

Let us now examine the representation of gender in a popular reading scheme. *Story Chest* began publication in this country in 1972 after initial success in Australia and New Zealand. It is a graded reader of "real" texts for primary school children and comprises twenty stages, starting with stories for beginner readers and developing through to mature paperbacks for children of 11+. There is also "Bridges", an additional 18 small books between Stages 1 and 2, comprising stories, mini-anthologies and non-fiction; and Selection Box (20 books). The publicity material stresses the absence of artificiality:

> ... these are real stories, plays and rhymes ... non-competitive and non-sexist ... [with a] wide variety of themes which appeal to children. (E J Arnold, publisher)

The cover of this brochure shows a picture of a boy riding the crest of a wave on a giant swordfish. Not a girl in sight! Titles are still being added to the collection so that *Story Chest* now spans twenty years during which gender representation has developed as an issue. Yet the number of stories about women is still far from being equal. Indeed, for that to happen, 133 new titles in which women were the central characters would have to be added.

Procedure

To compare the visibility of female and male protagonists in *Story Chest*, the gender of the "theme" (Brown and Yule, 1983: 135) in each text was assigned to one of four categories: Female (F), Neuter (N), Plural (P) or Male (M). In fiction texts, one, two or more main characters of the same sex were coded as M or F as appropriate. Two or more characters of mixed sex were coded as P. Animal stories in which the characters were not anthropomorphized, ie where the animal was always referred to by its common name and not by a proper name or male or female personal pronoun, were coded as N. Non-fiction texts were treated in one of three ways: (1) if it took the form of biography, eg Lady Godiva, it was coded as for fiction; (2) if the text provided information on non-human matters, eg plants or volcanoes, it was coded as N; (3) games, puzzles and instructions, eg making party masks, were not coded (but "Mr Davies makes baskets," Bridges collection C, was coded as M). Each text in an anthology, fiction or non-fiction, was given a separate coding, so a collection of folk tales like "Around the World" (Stage 10) might receive seven separate codings. All texts published to date were coded, ie all books in the twenty Stages plus "Bridges" and "Selection Box". A total of 243 books were analyzed in this way. See Table 1.

Results

Figure 1 omits neuter and plural codings to emphasise the contrast between female and male characters. In only one case (Stage 16) are there more single female protagonists than males; elsewhere single male protagonists outnumber females by as many as 9:1 ("Selection Box"). Overall, where we might expect an equal ratio to reflect the biological number of women and men, in *Story Chest*, after assigning the plural counts to each sex in turn, it is 3(M):2(F); looking at single protagonists alone it is more than 2:1. The rank order of the four codings in Table 2 shows that none of the three non-female codings is less than the female:

Table 1: Analysis of sex and gender in *Story Chest*

	Text theme				Author	
Level	Female	Plural	Neuter	Male	Female	Male
1	8	13	13	14	96	0
Bridges	6	5	0	7	12	6
2	3	3	2	3	9	0
3	1	8	5	2	11	0
4	2	4	6	4	12	0
5	3	6	9	5	9	0
6	2	8	1	10	12	0
7	7	5	0	7	12	0
8	9	1	2	14	6	3
9	2	4	8	12	5	4
10	2	5	10	8	7	6
11	3	2	6	17	3	6
12	3	3	9	12	5	6
13	4	2	6	12	5	6
14	4	2	8	14	5	6
15	8	3	5	11	4	6
16	15	6	9	14	3	8
17	3	4	8	16	7	7
18	6	7	8	9	4	7
19	2	2	14	12	2	8
20	6	6	0	13	8	6
Selection Box	2	2	1	18	11	8
TOTALS	**101**	**101**	**130**	**234**	**234**	**93**

Table 2: Rank order of text theme gender

F: 101
P: 101
N: 130
M: 234
Total: 566

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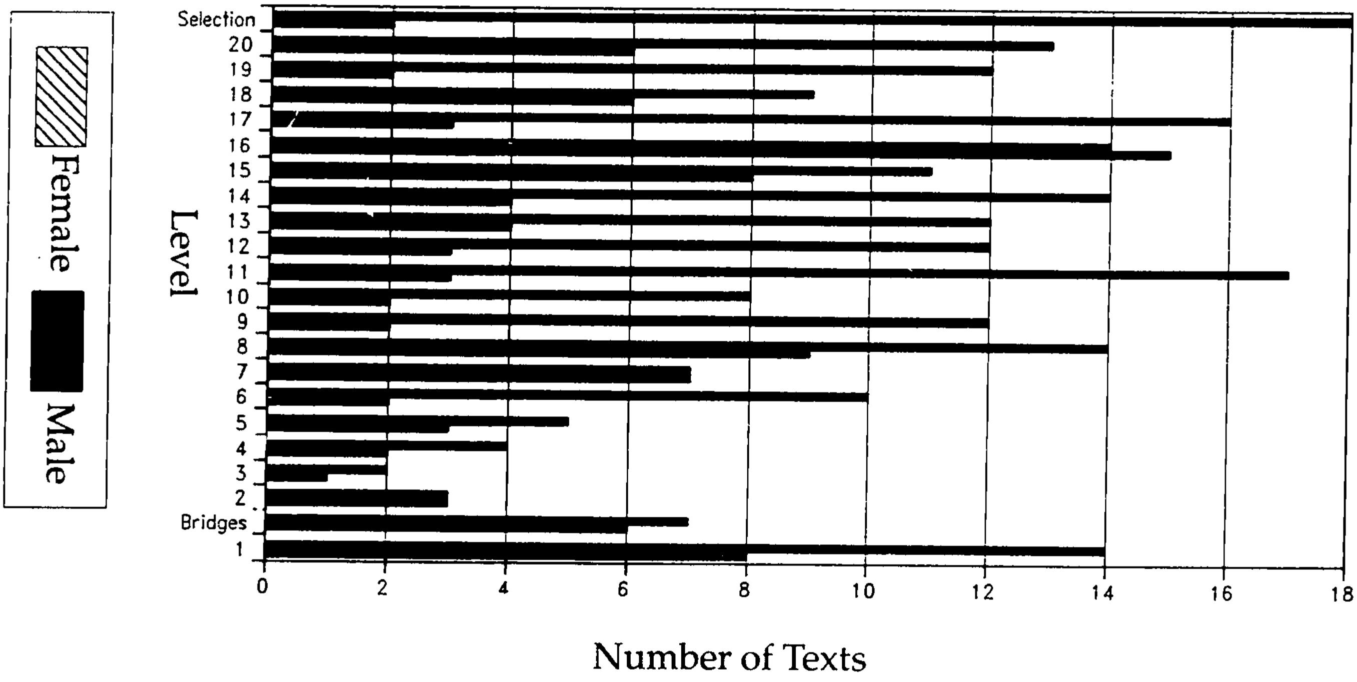
Figure 1

Story Chest: Gender of Themes



Analysis of *Story Chest* authors by sex

Authors were assigned to a Male or Female category once per book. The results were surprising. Authors for the first seven levels were exclusively female with Stage 1 alone comprising 96 women (all 48 books were written by two authors). However, male authors outnumber female in Stages 10-16 and 18-19. Here, one might infer more complex structural workings, eg women being associated with caring for infant children and men enjoying the prestige of writing for an older audience. The overall ratio is more than 2(F):1(M).

Cross-tabulation

There is some evidence of an inverse relationship between sex of author and ratio of female to male characters in particular Stages, eg in Stage 16 (the only one in which female characters outnumber males) there are nearly three times as many male authors: 3(F):8(M). On the other hand, Stage 1 (8(F):14(M) characters) is written exclusively by women: 96(F):0(M). Incidentally, both non-sexist children's books recommended by Ord and Quigley (1985) are written by men: *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch 1982) referred to earlier and *All the King's Horses* (Foreman 1976).

Comment

Story Chest does indeed portray some minority groups sympathetically, with representative characters in peripheral rather than main roles. This is especially so in the plays, eg "Terri", which concerns a mixed race family, one of whose children is paraplegic. There remains, however, a gross under-representation of women and a stereotypical treatment of some of those who do appear as main characters. For example, "The Playground" (Mahy 1986) is the story of how Lynnette, who is too afraid to play with the other children on the swings and roundabouts, is eventually tempted to try at night by some mysterious childlike-figures emanating from seagulls. She finds the experience addictive and becomes more daring than her friends. It is a pity that this story is not about a boy who is afraid to play and that, rather than personally chosen, the solution is externalised, a kind of *deus ex machina*.

There is the family who waits for dad, the "Big Tease", to return with supper after the football match, the woman holding the baby (Cowley and Melsor 1982). For a few hilarious moments, the Big Tease pretends he has forgotten all about it: "I like to see you get mad," he tells mum, before handing over take-aways and a box of chocolates. Mum and the children are very much the passive recipients of largesse from this bearded patriarch. However much this may reflect children's real experience of home life - father going out for the evening while everyone else stays at home, clearly identified as the provider and therefore having the power to manipulate (teasing is one manifestation of these unequal relations) - the job of challenging such sexist behaviour is left to someone else (the teacher, mum, dad!?).

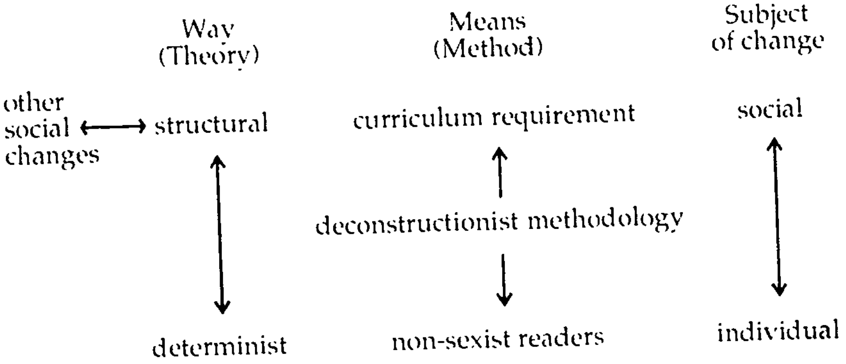
Even in the socially aware play, "Terri", (Foot 1987), it is dad who does the exterior decorating, while mum cooks the meal, looks after their disabled daughter, and organises activities for the other children. So what's new? I hear you say. Well, evidently not the characters in *Story Chest*.

Many structuralists would maintain that such differences in gender representation reflect rather than create social inequality and that changing representation, eg having more girls and women as central characters and depicting more assertive behaviour, can only have a transitory effect. In one way or another, they advocate changing social structures as the way to create non-sexist behaviour and achieve equal relations between men and women. They would claim that the introduction of legislation such as the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) is more important than attempts to change how gender is represented in reading schemes. In the end, they would say, this approach is more likely to influence people's attitudes and behaviour.

Whether one advocates individual change or change in social structures, both imply a role for classroom teachers. It is hardly conceivable that the majority of pupils in a sexist society will by themselves develop the self-awareness to recognise literary stereotypes and the under-representation of women and girls. Davies (1989) has suggested how children of both sexes have far too much invested in present gender divisions.

The dissemination of a new methodology will not be sufficient without new materials. The publication of non-sexist materials alone will be ignored by many schools unless (i) they carry the patriarchal stamp of authority, eg they are required reading for a SAT Test (ii) the teacher understands and is committed to active intervention and deconstruction of texts in class discussion. Both determinist and structural theories would inform each other in a combined solution:

Figure 2: Suggested model for non-sexist innovation in children's readers


Way
(Theory)
Means
(Method)
Subject
of change
other
social
changes
structural
curriculum requirement
social
deconstructionist methodology
determinist
non-sexist readers
individual

As a start, a number of teachers interested in this issue could compile their own alternative reading schemes, possibly making use of non-sexist children's books recommended by such organisations as the Letterbox Library (see Appendix) and, to estimate level, one of the many readability formulae. As teacher/authors they could write their own materials, or edit anthologies, and combine resources to bombard publishing houses with the results. There are plenty of examples of teacher/authors in *Story Chest*. Lastly, there is no shortage of materials to collectively deconstruct in the classroom. The *Story Chest* texts discussed above would make a good beginning.

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Appendix

The Letterbox Library is a group of women committed to making non-sexist and multi-cultural books for children more widely available. A regular newsletter and list of titles are available for a £5 subscription from:

Letterbox Library
Unit 2D, Leroy House
436 Essex Road
London N1 3QP
Telephone: 071 226 1633
Fax: 071 226 1768

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Gill Inscombe, Shirley Hampton and Chris Slattery for use of the Reading Resources Centre at La Sainte Union College, Southampton.

Reading to Learn: Study Reading for All?

Virginia Kelly

The Learning Disabilities Clinic housed within the University of Southampton School of Education provides literacy teaching and curriculum access support for pupils of secondary school age who have specific learning difficulties (SpLD). These are the pupils who are widely referred to as "dyslexic": young people of at least average intelligence with apparently anomalous reading, spelling and writing difficulties. During the twelve years the LDC has been operating, we have moved increasingly towards teaching based on the pupils' curriculum assignments from school; by now, our work is almost entirely focused in this way. Naturally, this has brought with it an intense focus on study skills, since pupils who read and write slowly need to be highly efficient in the way they employ these skills.

Over the last two years, we have done a number of short in-service courses with teachers on implementing our study skills approach within subject classrooms, and the feedback from these has made us feel our work on study skills may be relevant to a much wider group of pupils and teachers than our original client group. It seems possible that, on the one hand, confusion about what and how to teach about study skills is more widely spread than we had appreciated, and on the other, that tools developed for the acute needs of pupils with SpLD are highly likely to be efficient also for a wider range of pupils.

This paper focuses particularly on what we call "study reading". By study reading we mean attentive reading to learn and remember, as distinct from a more relaxed style appropriate to simply following a narrative or browsing for one's own, self-set purposes. Study reading is specifically reading to learn. I shall look first at some areas which have emerged from our work as "accident black spots" in our students' attempts to use reading as a tool in their learning and outline briefly some ways we have found effective in helping them. Then I shall look explicitly at some of the concerns related to study reading which arise out of our work with teachers, both on our courses and those who work in schools as class teachers of students who attend the LDC.

The paper is intended very much in the spirit of a working paper: not a prescriptive list of things to do, but an exploration of issues, presented in the hope of eliciting response from an interested audience about the potential applicability of the ideas in other contexts.

Attacking the text

Few of our students come to us with a variety of reading styles at their command. Indeed, we count ourselves fortunate if they truly command a single style. One of the accidental outcomes of a long struggle with decoding skills seems to be a generalised impression that all true reading begins at the top left corner and carries on word by word until print ceases at some (far away) bottom right corner. Even students who read in other ways outside school (reading hobby magazines by looking at pictures and occasionally sampling the text, for example) usually revert to a "top left" style when the reading is being done for school. This is of course, extremely inefficient, especially for a poor decoder, who needs every bit of context clue she/he can absorb in order to support making good guesses about unknown words.

One of the first study aids we offer students is, therefore, a general attack plan for tackling new reading assignments. Essentially it is encouragement to answer the question: "How much can you find out about this piece of text without reading it through?" Beyond the first response of a mystified look, students can be encouraged to find a lot of information in pictures, diagrams, headlines and titles, headings, captions, bold text, arrangement of the page. It is bleak school text indeed these days that is just lines of uniform print all over the page, and even that can be made to yield information by reading first and last paragraphs and then first and last lines of each intervening paragraph. (A panic-stricken student recently was delighted to find she could do her whole geography assignment by the last method combined with what she remembered from class. Having processed a lot of information very successfully, she asked, "Well, I did do it all myself, so do you think I need to tell them I couldn't read it?")

Making explicit the many clues available before a detailed reading helps students develop an internalised list of things to look for and where to look. It gives specific meaning to the term "skimming" which is much-listed among reading skills and rarely defined in sufficient practical detail to be really useful. (A notable exception is Grellet, 1981.) Using these pointers helps a pupil engage from the beginning with the content of the reading and, as a by-product, activates any relevant background knowledge. And it puts all this within the reach of the students who need it most: those who are "poor readers" in some way, who by definition will not have time to read a passage several times or will gain little from doing so.

Task analysis: Why am I reading this?

The second big gap we find in our students' approach to study reading is their general failure to relate the focus of their reading to what they are eventually going to do with the information they will gain from reading. Other teaching experiences of ours as well as reports from teachers on our INSET courses indicate this problem extends well beyond the group of students with whom we typically work at the Clinic. The best students at GCSE level read purposefully with a firm idea of collecting material relevant to a particular aim, perhaps finding facts about a topic, preparing an argument, or tracing a sequence of events. Moving down the age or performance ladder, this becomes correspondingly more rare. Far too few students take "read this carefully" as anything other than reading each word in order and trying to remember them all.

To some extent for our students this is related to poor grasp of what the eventual aim of the reading actually is, even when the teacher thinks he/she has made this clear. Much school reading is related to writing tasks, and our students, as poor writers as well as poor readers, may well have little experience of completing writing assignments satisfactorily. "Write an essay about..." may, in practice, mean "get down a few things related to the topic using words you can spell and be sure you have some full stops in it". This hardly provides an adequate guide for selective reading and reprocessing! Even reading to answer a set of questions is complicated by the fact that questions are often used by teachers both to check present comprehension and to produce a readable record of information for future revision. A student who fails to grasp this may be mystified by the teacher's insistence that succinct expression of individual facts produces inadequate answers. Several experiences later, this misunderstanding can be one of the causes of students' insistence that our advice to read the questions before reading the passage is cheating. A further difficulty in relating reading to task arises when the task is not defined at the time the reading is assigned. This may be for what seem good and sufficient reasons to the teacher. Perhaps several aspects of a topic are to be explored and then combined in one writing assignment. Or perhaps the reading assignment is long, such as a novel, and there may later be a choice of several tasks. Or perhaps the teacher does not want to over-direct the students' initial response to the reading. Whatever the reason, the effect for many readers in the class will be to leave them rudderless as they read. (It is worth noting that the school context is sufficient clue so that the most sophisticated students will tend to assume a related writing task to come and begin a kind of "underground" preparation as they read in any case.)

Since our Clinic students are almost always in the highly vulnerable group of readers - either very slow or poor comprehenders or both - we have found it useful to stress what we call Task Analysis as a key part of our study skills teaching. Before they start detailed reading we get students to ask - and answer! - the question: "What, exactly, am I going to have to do about this when I have finished reading it?" Students need help to learn to make the answer to this question explicit and detailed. "Make some notes" is not sufficient and will elicit two further questions: Why? and In what form? A student who can answer these two questions has gone a long way down the road to turning a vague, global task ("Read this for homework") into a well-defined action plan which will make for active, effective reading.

To deal usefully with the realities of school assignments, task analysis needs to be quite sophisticated, and students cannot be expected to do it effectively based on a single experience. For example, they need to realise there may be several levels of reason for setting a writing task and the reading style needs to be appropriate to them all. And where no task has yet been set, we help students learn to ask, "Why would the teacher have asked me to read this? What does it have to do with what we are doing in class? What work might we have to do related to it?" Many become surprisingly good at this, showing great perception about the kinds of assignments particular teachers favour.

Notes and highlights

Few of our students can be consistently active, engaged readers unless they are doing something about the text they are reading. Task analysis helps by giving them a clear idea of what they are looking for, but many easily drift off once they begin the difficult process of decoding the core of the text. In addition, they are likely to need a quick way to check back over text they have read to review points or select material to learn. Both these factors lead us towards activities involving photocopying and marking the text or making notes as ways of focusing on the extraction of particular information from the text as they read.

Highlighting is probably the easiest form of text selection for students to grasp and has the huge advantage of not requiring additional writing, at least immediately. Many students enjoy using colours and the technique is generally seen as "grown up", which makes it acceptable in the classroom. Set against these advantages, we have found it easy for students (and some teachers) to see highlighting as a panacea. Dazzled by the colours and, perhaps, the success of a first attempt, they latch on to an unsophisticated use of the technique and are disappointed when it proves ill-suited to later circumstances and the student seems to make no further progress.

Note making of any sort, including highlighting, involves re-processing the content of the text in the light of particular criteria. As such, it is a complex process. Students need to know that there are different styles of notes and that a decision needs to be made between them. This decision depends on at least three factors: the type of text, the student's own preference, and the eventual use to which the notes will be put. Balancing these involves both knowledge and thought, and choosing effectively usually involves a good bit of experience as well. One of the things we try

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to do for our students is help them acquire relevant experience fairly quickly, but they also need encouragement to be flexible. We stress the difference between a technique and a strategy. A technique is a specialised bit of knowledge about how to do something - for example, using a flow chart to make notes. To turn it into a strategy, the student must choose from a selection of techniques the one which will suit his or her purpose of the moment.

A look at a list of the types of note-making we cover in the course of a year with our older students will suggest the range of experience which can be made available.

* highlighting by specific criteria
* titling paragraphs
* outlining
* flow chart
* charts, tables and matrices
* "spider" diagram or idea map
* headings followed by lists
* key questions
* summaries
* time line
* cartoon strip
* diagram plus key word list

And there are many more, and variations on each, which will arise by-the-by as work comes in from school.

This may seem to have strayed from the subject of reading, but in fact it appears to be highly relevant from the students' point of view. Again and again we find students' comprehension and ability to use information from text climbs steadily upward once they begin to use a sequenced approach of getting a general overview, analysing the task(s) in hand, choosing a recording/note-making style, and then reading in detail. The inter-relationship between appreciating text structure and choice of note-making style is a close one, and students who are conscious of this do a better job with both.

On finding the way ...

Many of the teachers who come on our courses or work with our students in school are uneasy because they say they feel their own grasp of techniques for study reading is too vague to allow them to help their students effectively. Our experience is that there are two answers to this, each of them partially effective.

The first is that teachers usually have more knowledge than they think they have to draw on. Almost all teachers have to be effective readers to get to be teachers, but most of them have become so automatic about how they do it that they find it hard to realize what they do. Real reflection as they tackle a reading task at their own level, continually asking themselves, "How did I know that? What cues am I using? Why do I do it that way?", will unearth many useful clues to pass on to students. Secondly, there are some very useful books which can be turned to good account by teachers interested in helping students grow in their ability to manage texts. Some that we have found useful are listed at the end of this paper for readers who may not know them already.

One secret of helping students seems to be raising their awareness of study reading as a process that can be learnt and practised, and at which they can gradually improve. To foster this, teachers certainly need to have some specialised knowledge of techniques which can be passed on. They also need to help students see the strategic elements in the process - the need to choose a way of working to match the task, for instance. Many of our students are amazed to learn that even expert readers have to make decisions about how to make notes in particular cases; they seem to think that for all the world except themselves, a magic "right" answer pops up as soon as the problem presents itself. To expose this decision making is the first step in helping students master it.

Helping students toward effective study reading must be a long-term job. No one teacher can do it in one year for all students in a class. On the other hand, the years of middle and secondary schooling are focused on learning from text to a degree that for most of the population will never be met again during their lives. If a substantial section of every group of children is not to underperform - or worse yet, feel a failure - during those years, it seems important that we pay explicit attention to this aspect of learning to read.

Bibliography: Directed Activities Related to Texts (DARTS)

DARTS activities focus on analysis and reprocessing of text as a way of helping readers fully understand what they read and are thus related to study reading as defined in this paper. Even children who need help in decoding the passages will gain confidence and understanding from undertaking this work.

For teachers

Brown A L and A S Palincsar (1987) "Reciprocal teaching of comprehension strategies: A natural history of one program for enhancing learning" in Day & Borkowski (eds.) *Intelligence and exceptionality: New directions for theory, assessment and instructional practices*, Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex - study of children learning effective reading by learning to teach each other.

Bulman L (1985) *Teaching Language and Study Skills in Secondary Science*, London: Heinemann Educational - covers a wide range of study skills, many of them focused on text.

Culshaw C & D Waters (1984 and ongoing) *Headwork series* Oxford: Oxford University Press - for many examples of how work can be set out which can be easily adapted for note making in any subject context.

Grellet F (1981) *Developing Reading Skills*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press - for a wide variety of approaches to studying text, with many specific examples appropriate to classroom subjects. An excellent introduction on the principles of designing reading comprehension exercises.

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Lunzer E and K Gardner (1984) *Learning from the Written Word*, Edinburgh: Schools Council / Oliver and Boyd - for the principles underlying this approach to study reading, and many detailed examples at the teacher's level.

McKeown S (ed.) (1983) *Effective Learning Skills*, London: ILEA - for good examples of note-making strategies with an emphasis on visual presentation and reformulation of information.

For work with pupils (eventually, any text can be adapted, but these books offer starting points.)

Gardner K (1984) *Study Reading, Books 1 & 2*, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd - texts with wide variety of related tasks requiring thought and reprocessing, rather than much writing.

Kilpatrick A, P McCall and S Palmer (1982) *I See What You Mean, Vols. 1 & 2*, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd - short samples of text which lead students towards graphic modelling of ideas; middle/lower secondary level.

Niven C (1980) *Study Skills 2 and 3*, Glasgow & London: Collins - workbooks, short passages with questions that cannot be answered by copying. (Book 1 on *Finding Information* is also useful.)

Sheldon S (1990) *Show Me, Tell Me*, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd - lots of good examples of alternative display, well-presented for middle school age-group.

Smith G & B Rasmusen (1985) *Context Reading, Books 1-4* , Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd - intended for whole class use at junior school level. Rather long passages but wide variety of activities. Associated work sheets.

Reading in a Foreign Language: A Self-Access Approach

George Blue

In recent years there has been a great deal of interest in learner-centred activities in language learning. The terms "self-directed language learning", "self-instruction", "learner independence", "individualisation" and "self-access" have come to be very widely used (and abused) and "self-access" in particular has come to be associated with student resources centres. Just as "self-service" in the culinary field is taken to mean that diners can take their choice from a range of dishes on offer, so "self-access" in the pedagogic field implies that learners can take their choice from a range of learning materials on offer. There can be no better place in which to do this than a resources centre. And just as the chef or waiter may advise on the choice of dishes but would not dream of making the choice for the diner (unless specifically requested to do so), so the teacher/ tutor/ helper/ consultant/ adviser may advise on the choice of learning materials but would not normally be expected to make the choice for the learner (unless specifically requested to do so). "Self-access" implies that the learning materials should be readily available for the learner to choose from, with user-friendly cataloguing systems, open-access shelves, etc. They would not normally be issued or directly controlled by the teacher, although of course the teacher may make recommendations, sometimes even strong recommendations.

Sometimes, of course, resources centres will be used by a class working with a teacher. There may be cases where the teacher would wish to remain in control of all the different activities, directing each learner to the materials or activities that are thought to be most suitable for that particular learner. This is certainly a form of individualisation that may go quite a long way towards meeting the individual needs of the learners, but the independence of the learner is somewhat restricted and it is arguable that such an approach is not making full use of the resources centre. Learners may feel frustrated, being surrounded by all sorts of interesting language learning materials but not having the opportunity to explore them or select from them. Adult learners in particular may find that such an approach does not motivate them to learn, especially if their own perception of their needs and interests does not fully coincide with the teacher's. Although there are always exceptions, a better solution would normally be for the learner to take the responsibility for selecting the materials, with the teacher/ adviser giving advice when requested or when it is seen to be necessary.

Thus, the setting up of a resources centre probably implies a commitment to self-directed language learning. Whilst this should not mean that learners will be left entirely to their own devices (the role of the language learning adviser being, to my mind, central to the operation of such a centre) it does mean that the majority if not all of the learning materials supplied should be suitable for learners to use on their own, without having to refer constantly to an adviser. Dickinson (1987) gives a useful list of "specific design features" for all self-instructional materials, explaining that the materials themselves should as far as possible "contain the help and information which a teacher would supply", whilst Chaix et al. (1978) discuss the criteria which make for successful self-access materials in some detail, under the general headings of "degree of autonomy", "degree of individualisation", "practicability", and "suitability" of materials.

It may be quite difficult to produce materials which meet these criteria for the productive skills of speaking and writing, since the communicative use of language is open-ended and is therefore difficult to predict accurately or to monitor. However, it should be much more manageable for the receptive skills of listening and reading. Even listening has the disadvantage that slowing down the speed of delivery may distort the message or render it inauthentic, whereas reading has the advantage that it can proceed at different speeds, although Smith (1985) has suggested that reading too slowly causes tunnel vision, which reduces the chances of comprehension. If we pay too much attention to each letter or even each word, it may be difficult to retain the individual words in the short-term memory long enough to build meaningful relationships between words. However, there are possibilities for slowing down reading speed and there is of course no limit to the number of times a text can be read and re-read. The aim of this paper is therefore to investigate the potential of self-access materials for reading in a foreign language, bearing in mind that these should be just about the easiest kind of self-access materials to produce and to use effectively.

My deliberate attempt to focus on this one skill should not be taken to imply that it is impossible to develop the other language skills in a self-directed mode, although I have suggested that it may be more difficult, particularly for the productive skills. Nor do I necessarily wish to suggest that it is a good thing to concentrate on one skill at the expense of all the others. There may be occasions when this is appropriate (e.g. the agricultural extension worker in Thailand who needs English in order to read about developments in agriculture but who is unlikely to want to use English productively or even to understand the spoken language; the scholar who needs to read Latin texts but who is unlikely to need any of the other language skills in Latin), but most learners will require and certainly will desire a more balanced approach to the language skills.

It is in any case open to question whether it is possible to learn one language skill without at the same time improving one's ability in the other skills. Krashen (1984) has claimed that extensive reading automatically gives rise to competence in writing, although this is almost certainly an overstatement of the case, as there are many examples of proficient readers in a foreign language (and even in their native language) whose writing skills remain quite rudimentary. To my mind, Krashen seriously underestimates the importance of developing what he calls "composing processes", which can best be done by paying conscious attention to the many different facets of writing and which may include the intensive study of written texts. Nevertheless, it is likely that in focusing on the reading skill one is not only developing this skill but also learning the language, and the language learnt will presumably in most cases be available for use in listening, speaking and writing.

This brings us to an interesting question which has received considerable attention in recent years (e.g. Nuttall 1982; Gremmo 1985): Is the use of a written text for the purposes of language improvement an "authentic" use of the text, or should we rather be using written texts for extracting

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meaning and developing reading skills? The same question viewed through the eyes of the learner or foreign language user has been addressed by Alderson (1984): Are difficulties encountered in reading in a foreign language due primarily to inadequate language competence or to inadequate reading skills? Although the empirical evidence is still rather scarce, it seems, as might be expected, that foreign language learners do in fact face both of these problems when reading in the foreign language. Consequently, I would wish to argue that learning materials should be devised both for language development and for reading skills development. In fact, it is sometimes difficult to retain a rigid distinction between the two, and many learning materials may be useful for both. In the remainder of this paper we shall consider some of the approaches that might be suitable for both language learning through reading and developing reading skills.

Developing language skills through reading

First of all, there can be no doubt that extensive reading can be an extremely effective means of gaining exposure to language, which can be not only a source of pleasure but also a source of language development. The reader's focus will normally be on meaning rather that form, and the language acquisition that takes place will therefore be largely unconscious and will tend towards fluency rather than accuracy development. This kind of reading can help to familiarise readers with lexical items, collocations, structures, cohesive and stylistic devices, and although these may initially only feature as part of the learner's receptive ability they may later give rise to productive language use.

Intensive reading is perhaps most commonly thought of as an excellent way of learning vocabulary, as lexical items are encountered in context and are often repeated several times in the same text. Various exercies can be devised to help master the vocabulary, and good examples are found in many textbooks. Scottetal. (1984) suggest simply writing down unfamiliar words in the text which look important and initially guessing at the meaning. However, Williams and Moran (1989) report on research which suggests that skilled readers both in L1 and L2 are incapable of guessing more than a small proportion of words and that their preferred strategy is to ignore rather than guess the meaning of unknown lexis. If intensive reading is being undertaken with a view to developing vocabulary, it may therefore be sensible to make good use of a dictionary, which may lead on to various types of vocabulary exercise or to different methods of organising lexical items to assist learning. One simple procedure that anybody can easily adopt for themselves is to photocopy the text and, after trying to learn the meanings of unfamiliar lexical items and the contexts in which they occur, to blank out these words in the photocopy. A few days later the text with the blanks can be used as a kind of modified cloze exercise to reinforce the vocabulary learning that has taken place, and the answers can be checked against the original

Intensive reading can also be a way of concentrating on grammar, either by looking for examples of a particular syntactic structure or by simply taking a few sentences and studying the syntactic structures encountered. This is no more "authentic" a use of texts written to be read than using them for vocabulary development, but it has certain advantages over decontextualised grammar exercises. The disadvantage with this approach to grammar is that some constructions may occur only infrequently, if at all, in the texts chosen for study and that it may therefore be difficult to obtain the necessary exposure or reinforcement.

Another use to which reading passages can be put is for the study of discourse markers and cohesive devices. Again, this has been very successfully exploited by a number of textbook writers (e.g. British Council 1979). Studying the ways in which pro-forms are used in a language and the relationships within and between sentences that are implied by certain linking words can be a very fruitful exercise which can help not only with recognition but also with the production of the appropriate forms in the foreign language.

Developing reading skills through reading

As with many human skills where we learn by doing, the best way to develop reading skills is probably by reading. There can be a number of goals in reading, and a comprehensive reading development programme will probably deal with each of these. Within a resources centre there should therefore be exercises that sensitise learners and help them to focus on each of these goals. Before we look at the goals in detail, though, it is worth mentioning that most texts lend themselves to reading for a number of different purposes, and a bank of reading passages can therefore be used in a number of different ways by different learners or by the same learners on different occasions. As producing a separate set of reading exercises for every reading passage can be extremely time-consuming, Scott et al. (1984) have devised a "standard exercise" for reading, which gives the reader a number of different goals and practises a variety of different reading strategies. One of the problems with exercises of this sort, though, is that by trying to be comprehensive they actually mitigate against replicating authentic reading purposes. In real life, readers would very rarely go through all of these stages with any one text, though they might go through most of the stages at some point in their reading of a variety of texts. Perhaps an element of choice in exercises needs to be introduced, along with a choice of texts. Scott et al. report, not surprisingly, that the standard exercise is very time-consuming, but they also claim that after students have tackled a minimum of 20 texts in this way they feel very much more confident about their ability to read authentic texts in English, and in particular about their ability to understand the "main points" of a text.

Until the mid-1970s most materials designed for teaching reading in a foreign language had as their major focus reading for detailed comprehension. This involves paying close attention to lexis and structures and may require the use of reference works, especially dictionaries. As an authentic reading exercise it certainly has some value, as there are occasions when such detailed study may be called for. However, with the dramatically increased quantity of written information that many of us now have to deal with, it is no longer a particularly common form of reading and, though it might be very useful for language learning purposes, it is probably less useful as a strategy for authentic reading in a foreign language.

In authentic reading one normally has a clear goal or purpose, which may be enjoyment of fiction, picking out interesting news items or commentaries in a newspaper, getting an idea of the main points covered by a book on applied linguistics, etc. When one is practising reading it may be useful to try and replicate these goals, and many more recent learning materials therefore include pre-reading activities, which encourage learners, among other things, to review what they already know about the subject, to predict from the title (and possibly a cursory glance at the text) what main points the passage is likely to include, and to define possible purposes for reading. This pre-reading stage may also serve to arouse interest in the topic and to increase motivation for reading by activating existing content schemata (Williams 1987). As Murtagh says in her review of the relevant research, "... good L2 readers use more information than resides in the text itself - background knowledge structures or content schemata also assist in predicting the text content".

In view of all this, it is hardly surprising that one of the strategies that learners are now encouraged to develop in a wide range of foreign language reading materials is skimming, or reading for gist. This is a strategy that can be applied to most texts, although some of course lend themselves to it more easily than others. Although it is widely practised in first language reading, it is surprisingly difficult for many learners to transfer this strategy to foreign language reading.

It may be useful for learners to observe their reading habits in their mother tongue (which of course may not always be good habits!) and to aim to emulate or improve on these when reading in a foreign language. One of the problems frequently encountered by learners practising skimming in a foreign language is that their imperfect mastery of the language reduces the number of clues available to them. This may make it more difficult to gain an overview of the meaning of the text from a limited sampling than would be the case for native speakers or for more proficient foreign language users. I do not wish to make light of these language difficulties and, as has already been mentioned, there can be a good case for developing language skills through reading. If our focus is on developing reading skills, though, the only way to improve one's skimming technique is by practice. Learners need to be encouraged to time themselves fairly strictly and, after an appropriate length of time has elapsed, to check their overall comprehension either by a small number of specially prepared questions or by writing a very short summary of the main ideas. These can later be checked either by comparing them with model answers or by more detailed re-reading of the text.

Fry (1963) and De Leeuw and De Leeuw (1965) both give good examples of reading passages with comprehension questions which can be used for skimming practice. However, some of these passages are rather short and may therefore be lacking in the redundancy and repeated semantic clues that are so necessary for successful skimming. As Clarke and Silberstein (1979) have said: "The easiest passage is not necessarily the shortest, but rather the one which is conceptually complete".

Closely related to the strategy of skimming is that of scanning, or reading for specific information. Again, this is a strategy that most efficient readers have frequent recourse to in their mother tongue, but it is not always transferred very successfully to the foreign language. A number of published course books give practice in scanning telephone directories, tables of contents, pages of advertisements and other types of text that easily lend themselves to scanning. These offer useful practice at the intermediate level, but foreign language learners often find it difficult to progress beyond this type of material to the more advanced scanning of dense prose in search of references to a particular topic. In a foreign language it is probably more crucial to identify the key words in advance of scanning, but apart from this the best way to improve one's scanning technique is probably by practising scanning! As the readers will not be familiar with the texts in advance a few carefully prepared questions will be necessary to help in this.

Reading for study purposes or for professional purposes often involves summarising and making notes as well as simply understanding the text. Even in their native language many readers find it very difficult to rephrase the content in their own words and to keep their notes to a manageable length. In a foreign language the problem can be compounded by lack of confidence in one's own ability to express the ideas clearly and by the feeling that one could never approach the elegance of the original writer. Something of the complexity of summary writing is described by Johns (1988). Nevertheless, there are a number of occasions when a summary couched in one's own words, and possibly with an element of evaluation, may be called for. Practice in this sort of exercise can be undertaken using almost any text of the reader's choice. It is an exercise that lends itself very easily to peer cooperation, where two learners may decide to work on the same text and then compare their summaries, possibly trying to agree on a concensus version. This can give very useful practice in identifying the most important points in a text and rejecting irrelevant or less important information. It is a very important skill for foreign language readers, many of whom find that there are occasions in their reading when they "can't see the wood for the trees" or when they suffer from a sort of "processing myopia" (Matthews 1989). Working with another learner in this way may also reduce or even eliminate the need to consult with a teacher or language learning adviser, thus helping the learners to develop their independence in language learning.

The process of summarising in one's own words is an important first stage in evaluating the text, and this brings us on to critical reading, a process which has been described in some detail by my colleagues Clare Mar-Molinero and Patrick Stevenson (1986). In some cultures the printed word is held in very high regard, having a kind of magical, almost sacred quality. For readers coming from such backgrounds it will therefore be very difficult to approach texts in a critical manner. However, readers from any background can generally be helped to understand something of the nature and function of different kinds of text, and carefully structured exercises will often bring them to the point where they can evaluate critically the content of different kinds of text (factual, persuasive, argumentative, etc.). As they develop this strategy they may be able to apply it to other texts that they read. This approach to foreign language reading may be helping learners to develop strategies that they have not previously learnt to apply when reading in their first language, and it is one of the many ways in which language learning can contribute to the general education of the learners.

Finally, a number of recent textbooks on reading in a foreign language have stressed the importance of general reading strategies, such as predicting, guessing the meaning of unknown words and phrases, recognising the relationships within sentences or between sentences, understanding the ways in which texts are organised, etc. This approach has been admirably described by Grellet (1981).

Closely linked to general reading strategies is the question of developing reading speed, and it is certainly the case that many people who are quite proficient in a foreign language still feel handicapped by inadequate reading speed. This is particularly true of foreign students coping with lengthy reading lists in the language of the country where they are studying, who often feel at a disadvantage compared with the native speakers studying alongside them. Fry's (1963) work on reading speed was quite influential in the field of EFL, while de Leeuw and de Leeuw (1965) have perhaps had a more general influence in mother tongue as well as foreign language reading. However, the emphasis in the last decade has been not so much on faster reading as on reading at the most appropriate speed. Faster reading techniques will certainly feature here, as it may often be better to read two or three texts with, say, 70% comprehension than one text with 95% comprehension (assuming that slower and more careful reading leads to greater comprehension, which may not necessarily be the case). However, there will be occasions when slower reading may be called for. Coady (1979) suggests that students should initially aim to increase reading speed so as later to have greater flexibility in rates of reading. Work in general reading strategies needs to sensitise learners to the need to read at the most appropriate speed, in addition to selecting all the other strategies to be employed with a particular text.

Conclusion

We have seen that reading in a foreign language is both a language problem and a reading problem, and that both of these problems can be solved or at least lessened by practice in reading. Reading for the purpose of language learning may not represent an authentic use of reading or an authentic response to the text (Widdowson 1976), but this does not invalidate it s an effective means of language learning. However, working on the language problem alone will not solve the reading problem, and work on reading strategies will normally be necessary too. I have aimed to show how learners can work on both of these problems on their own, using a well stocked language resources centre, with occasional reference to other learners and/or to a language learning adviser. Reading does seem to lend itself particularly well to a self-directed learning approach, providing learners have access to an adequate range of texts and exercises, and in most cases it should be possible to build the necessary feedback into the learning materials, thus keeping the input of the language learning adviser to the minimum.

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Reading and Communication in the Modern Languages Classroom

Michael Grenfell

Introduction

In the summer of 1990 a new crisis in education hit the headlines of the national press. Standards were falling! - in particular, reading standards. The main source of this news was the publication of the pamphlet *Sponsored Reading Failure* by the psychologist Martin Turner. The report (Turner 1990) claimed that there had been a significant fall in the reading scores of seven and eight year-olds in a number of Local Education Authorities. This news was controversial enough to cause a stir, but behind the headlines lay a potentially more contentious issue: simply why, if true, was this the case? The evidence presented in the report was hardly conclusive. Even so, reading quickly became the focus for a debate on the nature and style of teaching itself.

It is certainly true that reading has traditionally held a unique status in education. A child's reading age is often used as a measure of intelligence, or at least intellectual development. Similarly, much credence is given to HMI reports which suggest that children who are not capable readers by the age of seven are likely to experience learning difficulties later on in their school life. Reading, then, is often equated with the processes of learning themselves; the ease or difficulty experienced in each somehow running in parallel. The potential for this to become a full-blown debate on the quality of our schools, and the teaching in them, was therefore enormous. Yet, if reading has had such a high profile in the hearts and minds of journalists, educationalists and the public at large, its significance and role in the teaching of modern foreign languages has curiously been quite the reverse. Of the "four skills" it is probably the one that is the most often overlooked, the most taken for granted. Reading is regarded at best as a passive skill. Similarly, reading is seen as a "filler" for times when the teacher is not in the classroom, or reading exercises are mostly used as comprehension tests.

In this paper I want to begin by setting out some of the issues underlying the recent "reading crisis" in British schools and link them with the types of "communicative techniques" we are currently developing in modern languages teaching. By doing this, I want to highlight some of the problems we are experiencing in exam and syllabus design, and to use reading as a focus for suggesting a more refined teaching approach. The second part of this paper will then give a more detailed consideration of the practical application of reading in the modern languages classroom; in particular, ways of reading and the content and form of a modern languages reading programme.

Reading and communication

Central to the report on reading failure cited earlier (Turner 1990) is a clear criticism of the style of methodology in teaching reading; in particular, the belief that the beginning of the fall in reading scores coincided with the growth in newer, unstructured methods. The main "culprit" here, it seems, is the spread of "Real Books", and the consequent approaches to teaching children to read. Real books probably have no single coherent theory behind them, although generally a psycholinguistic angle is taken, which emphasises the relationships children form with books when reading them. Children are expected to use contexts and clues from their reading in "making sense" of texts.

In this, what the child brings to the books - experiences, thoughts and emotions - are all important. Reading is consequently built up in the same way that speaking develops, with the child gaining increasing competence at his/her own pace. It is often referred to as an "apprenticeship". The "real books method", if there is one, is normally opposed to "phonics". Here children learn by matching sounds to combinations of letters. Each word is, therefore, a cluster of sound and letter combinations which are built up to make sense of words, phrases and sentences. Each of these is therefore decoded by children by applying the phonic rules they have learnt. This systematic and structured teaching of letters, words, etc. is widely regarded as being more traditional; particularly by those concerned with working towards a more general reform of "progressive" developments in teaching in schools. "The way I see it, teaching reading is phonics. Phonics is teaching reading. The rest is practice", so claimed Mona McNee, secretary of the Reading Reform Foundation. (*TES* 5.10.90 - "Reading reformers long for the old ways").

A similar confrontational debate, quieter perhaps but no less controversial, has surrounded the teaching of modern foreign languages; namely a structural (grammar) versus a psycholinguistic (communicative) approach. On the one hand, there exists a method which views the learning of a language as a gradual accumulation of a series of structural building blocks; on the other, a holistic approach based around making sense of and in the language, of contextualised response and personal meaning. It is a moot point whether either of these polarised methods exist in their pure form in first or second language learning. However, there are clearly issues here that strike at the fundamentals of what we understand language and language learning to be. With this in mind, I now want to set out the ways I believe modern approaches to foreign language teaching have been interpreted and show how this has downgraded the importance of reading in learning languages.

Most syllabuses, course books and assessment schemes are now avowedly "communicative". Yet the term itself is problematic (Grenfell 1991). CILT Information Sheet No. 12 (CILT 1989) lists 10 key principles for the communicative classroom:

1) Intention to mean
2) Information gap
3) Personalisation
4) Unpredictability
5) Legitimacy
6) Target language use
7) Approach to error
8) Authenticity
9) Speech v. writing
10) Practice v. real language

If we take the "four skills" - writing, reading, speaking and listening - as a basis for teaching languages, it is likely, although by no means inevitable, that following such principles will lead to a predominance of oral/aural activities over reading and writing. In this case, speech, both spoken and heard, will be the main medium for classroom teaching. So, intention to mean, information gap, personalisation, unpredictability, target language

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use, approach to error are all most easily interpreted in activities where learners talk and listen. This is one reason why oral work in the target language has become the dominant feature of language teaching in a GCSE world. Another may be simply a reaction against O-level, with its overt emphasis on grammar work and translation. It is also a question of being pragmatic; the would be pupil-as-tourist will need to get by in a foreign country - he/she will be unable to do this without reasonable oral proficiency. However, behind this feature of oral dominance lie other methodological and theoretical assumptions; most notably, perhaps, that language is best learnt through exposure to it. This "understanding" has probably filtered down to language classrooms through the influence of such writers as Stephen Krashen, with his insistence on comprehensible input and the distinction he popularised between learning and acquisition (Krashen 1981, 1982). In his model, learning grammar is at best an adjunct to real language acquisition, which mostly takes place through the absorption and production of as much language as possible. Again, it is assumed that adopting this perspective on language learning and teaching will require mostly oral/aural proficiency, and thus speaking and listening remain the major classroom activities.

GCSE

I would argue that it is precisely this assumption that has shaped the GCSE classroom, and that the four skills therefore are not treated with equal status. Typical practice is most likely to consist of speaking and listening in tandem for main teaching purposes, with writing activities as back-up and consolidation exercises where necessary. Reading is then regarded as complementary, particularly in testing comprehension. Ironically, however, this is to put the emphasis of work on possibly the most demanding areas of language learning. Listening to foreign languages is notoriously difficult and tiring, even for the most able. Yet, the reality is that we expect learners to do this every day, and to pick out specific points of information in the course of doing so. Surely, nothing is more likely to build up a wall of incomprehension, or defeat the learner, than insisting on identifying semantic details. The problem of losing the gist, panicking or switching off is therefore chronic. Similarly, the kind of language encountered during the standard type of role play gives little opportunity for the focus on sense and meaning necessary for semantic and syntactic information to become apparent to the learner. It is often possible, given the required tasks, for the learner to run through them in a manner that allows him/her to be oblivious to what the other partner in the conversation is saying. So when a task states: "ask for 500 grammes of cheese and four apples", and the teacher, in order to "extend" pupils, asks "which cheese?", it is not uncommon for a pupil, in reply to the first question, to simply go on to the next - "and four apples". Clearly, there is no personalisation of language in such exchanges, so it is unsurprising if these exercises yield poor results as learning activities. In order for learners to learn language they must make sense. This means production of language in a creative, goal directed manner. It also means taking on board language as the basis of an individualised response. I find it difficult to believe that this is the case with the type of speaking/listening activities so apparent in many language learning classrooms to-day. It is not my intention, in the present context, to repeat ideas concerning reshaping oral/aural work along more process-based lines (Grenfell 1991), neither am I suggesting that the spoken word is not important in language learning. My intention rather is to discuss the place that reading might have in an enhanced form of communicative language teaching.

I have suggested that reading must have a more central role to play in learning languages. A cursory glance at any standard course book reveals the lack of attention paid to it; what does exist tends to be of a fairly literal comprehension kind. This seems to be a symptom of GCSE teaching with all its emphasis on pupil-as-tourist language. The National Criteria for GCSE make this clear:

> Basic Reading - Candidates should be expected ... to demonstrate understanding of public notices and signs (e.g. menus, timetables, advertisements) and the ability to extract relevant specific information from such texts as simple brochures, guides, letters and forms of imaginative writing considered to be within the experience of, and reflecting the interests of, sixteen year-olds. (DES 1985: 2)

The word "imaginative" is clearly problematic here, as the criteria have been mostly taken by exam boards to mean lots of timetables, posters, newsclips, etc. So, a hotel advertisement is invariably followed by such standard type questions as:

a) What is the cost of the dearest room with meals?

b) When is it closed?

c) Why is it suitable for children?

(SEG 1989, General and Extended Reading: 6)

It is hard to see the place of imagination in this style of work.

Higher level reading does not fare much better. In addition to basic skills, candidates are expected to "demonstrate the ability to identify the important points or themes within an extended piece of writing and draw conclusions from, and see relations within, an extended text" (DES 1985: 3). Here is an example of how this has been translated into practice:

> Au 55 de la rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré, le Père Noël, traditionnellement, descend avec quelques jours d'avance sur sa visite du 25 décembre. Mercredi dernier, il était, comme chaque année, fidèle au rendez-vous de l'Elysée.
>
> Dans la cour du Palais Présidentiel cinq cent enfants heureux l'attendaient. Vers cinq heures des personnages en costume blanc arrivèrent et, enveloppés dans des nuages de fumée bleus, blancs et rouges, donnèrent aux petits invités du Président et de Mme François Mitterand un concert de saxophones.
>
> a) Who lives at 55 rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré? (1 mark)
>
> b) Say when the event usually takes place. (1 mark)
>
> c) Describe the appearance of the saxophone players. (3 marks)
>
> (SEG, 1988 : 2: Extended Reading)

Three more paragraphs continue in the same vein; with questions chronologically placed, and depending on specific semantic equivalents to test comprehension. In this case, pupils need to "know" the meaning of "quelques jours d'avance", "L'Elysée" (although they get another clue with Palais Présidentiel), and "en costume blanc... enveloppés dans les nuages de fumée bleus, blancs et rouges". As an aside, we may well ask just how the three marks available for the last question are divided up? Although it need not have been the case, reading is here treated as a sophisticated form of vocabulary test. I am not claiming that it is always so in every GCSE exam paper, but generally this approach is the predominant one. Publishers have followed the same lines, and have exacerbated the situation, with books which essentially deal with reading as an information-seeking activity. *Orientierung*, *Porte Ouverte* and *Points Cardinaux* are all good examples of this. It is as if speaking and writing have become limited to the transactional, to the giving and receiving of information, and reading has become literal information retrieval: but this is a very one-dimensional way of looking at reading, very narrow in its application and uses. It is symptomatic of the limited view of sense and meaning apparent in interpreting methodological approaches to language teaching in our GCSE world.

Reasons for reading

Despite these trends, it remains difficult to understand fully the current downgrading in status of reading in language teaching. It is, after all, the least inhibiting of the four skills; the most comfortable to work with. Pupils can work at their own pace, reading, re-reading, checking, and responding with their own thought patterns. At the very least, this frees lessons from over-domination by the teacher. Reading for the individual, therefore, can play a more significant role in creating independence for language learners. Recent work on autonomy and language learning (CILT 1990) suggests that the true essence of communication can only be developed in learners when they take charge of their own language, when they own it for themselves. This is clearly not the case in the vast majority of transactional discourses set up in teacher-dominated classrooms. Reading activities, in contrast, allow learners to work within their own linguistic world; they can encourage reflection within a wide range of texts, with or without visual support. The teacher can be freed to give help, either to individuals or groups, if more collaborative work is organised.

The significance of reading in modern language learning is not simply a question of pragmatics and classroom management. Even if we take an uncritical view of Krashen's theories on language acquisition, it is clearly the case that reading is an important source of linguistic exposure. In reviewing the research literature on reading and writing, Krashen (1984) suggests that the former is an excellent source of comprehensible input to aid acquisition. In this case, reading is valuable because it helps familiarisation with basic structural and syntactic features of language. But in order for this to occur, readers must engage with a text at various levels of meaning, from the literal to the more sophisticated areas of personal response. So, despite the formal problems that Krashen has had in presenting his model of language learning, there is, central to it, the creation of sense and meaning for learners on the way to improving their linguistic competence. Reading has an obvious part to play in this. The importance of making personal sense is also central to the views of the psycholinguist Vygotsky. He developed the theme of "inner speech" (Vygotsky 1986 : 32/33) as that language which is created for oneself in making sense in language and thought. It is not overt speech, which is invariably shared with someone, but speech-for-oneself. It is speech connected to contexts and emotional responses, and requires the minimum linguistic information in forming thought processes. The emphasis is on a personal linguistic world which is accessed during the process of its growth and development. The major trend of giving and asking for speech in language lessons is therefore not enough. This language must be converted and processed in inner speech, as it is here that language is integrated and forms part of the learners' personal knowledge, about themselves and their environment. There is then some theoretical justification for believing that personal sense is a crucial part of effective language learning, and that reading can be particularly helpful in encouraging it.

Reading problems

There are clearly many problems in re-introducing reading into the modern languages classroom. It must firstly be recognised that casual reading itself may not be the normal pastime of pupils. In this case, they may be locked in the vicious circle (Nuttall 1982: 167) of not reading much, because slow reading and lack of comprehension reduce enjoyment of reading, which results in lack of reading, and so on and so forth. This is clearly a positive disincentive to developing good reading habits. Choice of text is therefore crucial. The level of language vocabulary and structure must match that of the pupil. Similarly, the subject content of the text must be matched to the pupil. A pupil may have a very low reading age in the language but can have a much higher interest level. It is hence a problem to find texts of a suitable linguistic complexity with appropriate sophistication of ideas. Secondly, insufficient time is often given over to reading in lessons: it is considered to be a "filler" activity. A third problem is that pupils are not always "taught" to read. There are a number of approaches and strategies to adopt when reading a text, and it is important that the pupils are aware of these when reading; in other words, to know why and how they should be reading. If these problems can be addressed, the result should be to break the vicious circle I referred to earlier, to move from a situation of non-reading to a position where more reading is done because it is enjoyable, and because it is enjoyable, readers read faster and understand more. The condition for this is that pupils must feel involved with what they are reading, must feel that they interact with the text in a manner which engages them.

Dimensions of reading

I argued before that a lot of GCSE-influenced language teaching was based on literal comprehension; employing the basic strategies of skimming and scanning for information details. Yet writers on reading have long since identified other comprehension skills. The Barrett taxonomy (Chapman et al. 1977: 158/159) lists five basic dimensions to reading: Literal - Reorganisation - Inferential Comprehension - Evaluation - Appreciation. Each of these is broken down into some thirty plus sub-categories. I do not intend to go into the finer details of these. Implicit in the taxonomy, however, is a move from the literal towards the more affective. Reorganisation is simply classifying, outlining and summarising given reading material, whilst inferential comprehension involves more intuitive and personal experiences in order to conjecture and hypothesize about character(s) and content. Similarly, judgements of fact or fiction and appropriate worth are found in the evaluative, whilst appreciation requires more personal, emotional responses from the reader. It is easy to see how these "higher" levels of reading skills are almost totally absent in our GCSE modern languages texts and syllabuses. Texts are simply not provided which allow the full development of comprehension skills, and, coincidental with this, teaching of the necessary reading skills and strategies. Such skills would include intensive and extensive reading, the correct questioning or approach to texts to make the most out of them and the ability to respond to information in the appropriate manner.

Reading processes

Many books (Grellet 1981; Salimbene 1986; Swarbrick 1990) now offer a variety of text attack activities for use in the classroom. They range from basic skimming, scanning techniques with simple box ticking exercises to activities designed to develop preference and appreciation of textual material. Some writers (Council of Europe 1988) find it convenient to link these activities under the heading of Pre-, During and Post-reading exercises. However, I feel that it is necessary to provide a clearer rationale for the way the types of activities can be linked to the stage pupils have attained in language learning. In other words, a reading policy needs to be based on the type of reading learners should be doing and when and how, rather than organised around a multitude of activities and exercises.

Figure 1

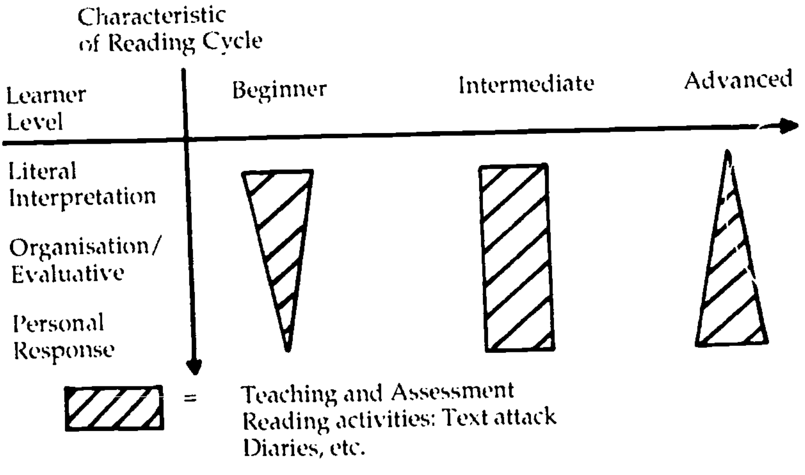
Characteristic
of Reading Cycle
Learner Level
Beginner
Intermediate
Advanced
Literal Interpretation
Organisation/ Evaluative
Personal Response
=
Teaching and Assessment
Reading activities: Text attack
Diaries, etc.

Figure 1 shows the outline of a simple scheme for developing a reading policy within a school curriculum. It is based around three cycles, moving from the literal levels of meaning to the more sophisticated levels of reader response. It assumes that most learners need to start at a literal level, matching sounds and sense to graphic representations. Here simple writing and vocabulary learning techniques are extremely useful, for example, look - cover - write - check, as are word games and general dictionary skills. At the other extreme, personal response moves into the whole area of individual affective reactions and imagination. The middle cycle includes both organisation and evaluation activities such as reordering paragraphs of texts, titling them, visual representations, filling in diagrams, or judgements of authenticity, appropriateness, etc., etc. The point I am making is that none of these cycles should represent just another list of teaching activities. Rather, the latter need to be thought of in terms of the stages of language learning processes. I have added Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced in order to signify that all three cycles should be included in the various learning stages. Therefore, it is important that "higher" (Cycle 3) reading activities be included as soon as possible in the beginners' reading experiences. Similarly, with advanced work (e.g. A-level), it will be necessary to include "lower" level activities in order to make the text more accessible to readers, as a way to aiding individual response. The blocked triangles and rectangle are an attempt to give a diagrammatic representation of the way the type of text activity will evolve in the course of increasing competence in the language. Of course, the sharp ends of the triangle are only possible theoretically. Also, the neatness of the shapes is misleading. The diagram is, however, trying to give some dynamic to the idea of one field of activity developing as others are more fully mastered; and thus less time is set aside for exercises which explicitly practise them. Teaching specific skills for specific cycle areas will, of course, be crucial, as will appropriate assessment formats. This does require careful classroom organisation. It is clear that time has to be made available to reinstate reading in the modern languages classroom. Silent reading for one period per week would pay enormous dividends for pupils' language learning: but active rather than passive reading; in other words, reading for a purpose, rather than simply to test comprehension. This requires careful preparation of a range of materials and a structured system to monitor what work has been done. Swarbrick (1990) has made some useful suggestions on how to implement reading diaries and provide opportunities for pupils to exercise greater autonomy in choice of reading, etc. As beginners, pupils are encouraged to express appreciation of what they are reading, even if it is for the artwork, or style of cartoon. Such devices surely begin to help pupils to see reading as something they can involve themselves in on a personal level. Much more, however, needs to be done.

Conclusion

I began this paper by recounting the story of the crisis in confidence which has beset the teaching of reading to British primary school pupils. I claimed that the juxtaposition of phonic and psycholinguistic methods in teaching reading was a chronic symptom of the debate in language learning *per se* which opposes structure and grammar to more open "progressive" approaches; and in this, we have the age old tension of questioning the primacy of structure and meaning. I believe that if the debate on reading has had less impact on modern language teaching, it is because our understanding of the nature of communication and the role of reading in it is still underdeveloped. This seems to lead to a misrecognition of the role of reading in enhancing pupils' communicative competence in language. Clearly, the recently published National Curriculum Document (D.E.S. 1990) goes a long way in suggesting more imaginative approaches to reading than have hitherto been put forward; in particular, how reading can be used as a stimulus for work in other skill areas. Similarly, it is true that recent developments in IT (text-based software, the use of the concept keyboard, etc.) make the range and possibilities of working with written texts more appealing and accessible to the entire ability range. It must be recognised, however, that, just as in other skill areas, a clear developmental rationale for progress in using texts needs to form the foundation of any reading programme. This may well be process-based and evolve qualitatively during the course of language learning. A lot of work has to be done to develop these. Mary Glasgow is at present the only major British publisher producing a range of readily accessible readers with their Bibliobus/Lesekiste series, and their range of modern languages comics.

Such publications go a long way to meeting the needs of teachers and pupils at an intermediate and beginner level. They are, however, limited both qualitatively and quantitatively. There is an acute need for advanced readers that can be used for more extensive reading, with appropriate language and subject content. French publications do not always offer an obvious source of these, as very often they include cultural information and assumptions, which can prove a hindrance to pupils' understanding and appreciation. Teachers will always find new class activities to enliven language lessons. They cannot be expected, however, to write entire readers. Hopefully, this gap in the market will be filled in the near future, and reading in modern foreign languages can become a more integral part of pupils' learning.

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Reading in French - GCSE to A Level

Pat Rees

Introduction

(This paper reports on research which I carried out at Taunton's (Sixth Form) College, Southampton in 1990. It formed part of my MA (Ed) dissertation for Southampton University under the supervision of Dr Rosamond Mitchell.)

I have long been intrigued by the process of reading which plays such a key part in learning, using, teaching and examining a foreign language. This study explores these issues via a profile of the reading experience of a group of students who had moved on from GCSE French to A Level French. They were the second intake of A Level students with a GCSE background.

My aim was to find out what they had actually read in French and also to compare theory with practice. How did the students' experiences correlate with the requirements of the Examination Boards? What could I learn about the interface between CCSE and A Level with regard to reading in French? Also, how could we best help them and their successors to read in a foreign language? I was therefore interested in their experience of study skills and reading strategies.

By means of Questionnaire and Group Interviews I took soundings concerning three stages in the development of a year group of A Level French students: retrospectively, with reference first to GCSE and then to the transitional point at the start of their A Level Course, and, thirdly, with reference to the present - at the end of their first A Level year.

The students surveyed came from four sets with three different teachers, following two separate A Level syllabuses in French; one set was studying for the London A Syllabus, with a Literature Paper on Set Texts, the other three were preparing for the SUJB/Cambridge Syllabus B, with an Individual Study on an aspect of France. Instead of a Literature Paper the latter had a Reading Programme of 1O-12 books in French examined at the Oral only and allowing scope for student and staff choice.

The questionnaire study

Fifty Questionnaires were distributed to First Year A Level students in early July, at the end of the third term of their course. Thirty-five were completed by respondents who had attended eleven different secondary schools.

The place of reading

As a starting point I wanted to ascertain how the students had perceived the relative importance of reading French in their secondary schools, bearing in mind than all four communicative skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing - are weighted equally at GCSE, each being allocated 25% of the total mark. It emerged that, viewed from the students' perspective, Reading had occupied second place in the hierarchy of skills, closely followed by Listening, with Speaking last. The front runner by far was Writing.

What students had read

The questions on Reading Materials were broken down into sub-sections on Coursebooks, Past Papers, Photocopied Texts, Magazines and Newspapers, Readers in French, Books in French (complete books as distinct from Readers or books of extracts) and French Poetry.

Coursebooks I found that Coursebooks had filled the foreground of the students' French reading experience. *Tricolore* predominated, with 24 users. Fewer than five had used any other. A small proportion had used ancillary books based on one or more discrete communicative skills alongside or instead, with an even tinier proportion using more than one.

Past papers Past papers are very special animals, being by definition a medium for testing. They are specially selected and often "doctored" to that end. Of the 26 students who had used Past Papers to practise Reading Comprehension skills in French, 12 had used between four and five of them. This is probably an adequate number to prepare for the examination if used alongside other reading materials.

Six students denied using past papers, and a further three did not know or were not sure, so nine of the 35 could not say they had used them, about one quarter of the total. It is doubtful if this is adequate preparation for the examination room, but at the other extreme the two students who worked on 15 and 2O past papers respectively may well have suffered from a chronic surfeit of a limited diet of text and question types.

Photocopies texts Photocopied texts or passages for reading in French were used by 27 respondents. 21 found them useful; about half (14) enjoyed them. A common thread in responses was that they offered a welcome variety in terms of relevance, topics, styles and vocabulary extending beyond coursebooks.

Magazines and newspapers Only six students claimed to have read any magazines or newspapers in French. Only three could supply any names - mostly of purpose-built products from educational publishing houses.

Readers in French Several students did not know the term "Reader" and requested clarification. Nine out of the 35 students were certain that they had used Readers, which suggests that up to 26 had not. Surprisingly, eight Readers were used during class time, while only three were used for private study or homework, despite their suitability for these purposes. Perhaps the reason was a shortage of books, or a fear that they would be lost if taken home.

The nine students' overall impressions of their Readers came across as very favourable, not only because they felt them to be an extension of their reading skills but also because they perceived them as a confidence-booster, providing confirmation of skills already acquired.

"Complete books" in French The readership of "complete books" in French other than Readers was extremely low. Only three out of 35 students had read any, and then only one apiece. They were estimated by them to be between 100 and 287 pages in length, with two of the three students reading them to the end. All found them useful, while two out of the three found them enjoyable - the ones who also finished them!

French poetry Six of the 35 students had read a very small amount of poetry. Only La Fontaine and Prevert were named. All enjoyed the poems they read, explaining why eloquently. This was unexpected, in view of the widespread belief that poetry fails to fire the modern 16-year old, but there seems to be a rich vein of personal fulfilment to be tapped through this genre of imaginative writing, if texts are well chosen.

Text length

The respondents' experience of text length proved highly revealing. The length of texts in GCSE Coursebooks mirrors the length of texts in GCSE Reading Tests. Aside from the three students who tackled whole books of up to 287 pages, the single student who read a magazine of 50 pages, the three who read similar materials of about 20 pages and the handful who read Readers of about 25 pages - and some of the students came within more than one of these categories - a clear majority of these post-GCSE students had read nothing longer than, at best, four or five paragraphs of continuous text in French. Two to three paragraphs had been more usual. In other words their experience did not exceed the length of the Reading Comprehension questions in the GCSE Examination Papers. Unsurprisingly, students who continue on to A Level courses find the longer texts there difficult to handle.

Training in reading skills

Students were asked whether they had received any kind of Reading Skills training in their secondary schools. Five students, one seventh of the total sample, claimed to have followed a Reading Skills Course. In no case had it been linked with French. It had formed part of normal lessons in English or History; four of the five had found it helpful.

Students were also asked about the role played by their French teacher in providing advice on tackling reading assignments in French. Only one fifth of them could recall specific advice. They were asked too whether their coursebooks had contained hints on reading strategies and, if so, whether these hints had been useful. Four only, one in nine, recalled advice in coursebooks, but only one of the four could name this advice.

In response to a direct question 22 of our 35 respondents said they would have welcomed a Reading Skills Course in French; eleven did not reply; some gave as their reason that they would then be more effective as readers of French at A Level.

Guidance on reading from the Boards

A syllabus is a public document. Students were questioned on their access to their Boards' French syllabus and on their awareness of advice from the Boards on tackling the examination.

The NEA French syllabus is distinctive in printing extensive advice on reading skills in French (Section 6, "Communication Strategies", pp.29-33). Although not actually advocating that the "Communication Strategies" section of the syllabus should be placed in the students' hands in its neat form, the Board nevertheless expects them to be familiar enough with its contents to apply them to language in context:

> Candidates cannot be expected to have met and mastered all the linguistic elements they will meet when reading and listening to authentic French. This leads to the need to develop communication strategies that can be used to cope successfully with unknown words.... These strategies will greatly increase the candidates' ability to cope when they meet, or need, language which they have not previously met or have forgotten. (p.29)

Recommended strategies include ignoring words not needed for successful completion of the task set, using the visual and verbal context, grammatical markers and categories, social and cultural context and common elements which English shares with French such as prefixes and suffixes, recognising and understanding characteristic noun endings, diminutives, etc., cognates and near-cognates. A list of 23 rules also helps in understanding thousands of words in French which are neither cognates nor near-cognates.

Had, therefore, the 23 out of 35 respondents who had taken the NEA French papers at GCSE become acquainted with these hints on reading strategies, either through self-study or via the teacher? Although 14 said they had seen a copy of the Board's syllabus, only one claimed to have read and found useful the hints on Reading Skills printed there. The possibility exists of defective recall. Maybe, too, these hints on reading strategies were conveyed to the students indirectly or in diluted form within the classroom only as they applied to individual texts. The fact remains that the students had not been conscious of assistance from the Examination Board in developing text-attack skills. Isn't it important, though, for students to see not only the particular, but also patterns taking them from the particular to the general, and vice-versa? How far is this done at present with GCSE?

The follow-up interviews

The Questionnaire established that the vast majority of the respondents had never read texts consisting of more than three paragraphs of continuous prose nor any imaginative writing in French before taking their GCSE. Follow-up Group Interviews, my second small-scale study, were designed to discover the same students' experience of the transition from GCSE to A Level.

The Interview was chosen for its flexibility as a medium. I could go on a "fishing" expedition, to borrow the analogy coined by Wiseman and Aron (quoted by Bell 1987 p.70), and I could follow up points made, pick up cues and probe replies, "put flesh on the bones of questionnaire responses", to quote Judith Bell (loc. cit.). I wanted a group dynamic, to let the students bounce ideas off each other, to let thought associations flow. Also it would be reassuring after the highly structured and fairly lengthy Questionnaire. Our dialogues were less like interviews than informal conversations on tape, part way along what Gebenek and Moser term "a continuum of formality" (Bell, p.71). I opted for recording so as to capture the students' tone of voice and to follow and take part in the dialogue as required, without the constraint of taking notes. A cassette recorder was placed on the table between us and left to run throughout.

The interviews took place during the third week of July, about ten days after the Questionnaire had been completed, the timing providing a space for further thoughts and even afterthoughts. A day or so in advance I outlined the areas for discussion, but I did not ask them to prepare their answers. I repeated these explanations just before the interviews. The wording of the questions was not scripted. I worked from a sheet of rough notes, giving the areas to be covered in the interviews. The total length of the recordings was about one and a half hours.

The eleven students participating in the group discussions were all volunteers from among the respondents to the Questionnaire, from eight different contributory schools, seven State and one private sector, representing just over one fifth of the Year Group, three from Syllabus A and eight from Syllabus B. These proportions closely reflected those on the courses in the College. However males were slightly over-represented among the interviewees. To preserve anonymity I have given the students invented first names according to their sex. Their comments are actual quotations transcribed from the tape.

Analysis of group discussions

There was consensus that the early weeks, even months, of the transition were a shock.

The Syllabus A students

The growing pains were particularly acute for the three studying for the A Level with Literature. Typical comments were:

> We didn't do much reading at GCSE at my last school so I found it quite difficult at A Level. It was a really big change. (Mary)
>
> It was a huge jump. (Jane)
>
> I don't think I was given anything to read, about half a page perhaps, newspaper articles about tourist attractions in the South of France, things like that, things which were relevant to GCSE. (Jane)
>
> Yes. They actually said, didn't they, that, you know, that they were just going to give you what you needed to pass the GCSE and nothing more really... and GCSE's just so different to A Level." (Mary)

The new (transitional) Coursebook, *Orientations* (1985), at the start of the College year had proved "something of a shock", despite its selection as a bridging text. The students focussed on vocabulary, reading speed and text length:

Vocabulary "We were presented with this book full of new vocabulary ... something which we hadn't really been used to up until then.", from Peter, who added reflectively, "But the more you actually take in of vocabulary, the more you can cope with other reading material ... in the end, you can only benefit, can't you?"

Mary, who found problems with structures and vocabulary, "everything really", appreciated the Coursebook for having the vocabulary on the page:

> ...because if you're reading something and then you have to go and look a word up, then you forget what you were reading anyway by the time you've found it and it just sort of seems like, you know, thousands of words that you just keep translating. It doesn't seem like it's building up and making anything.

Text length This Group's discussion of reading was dominated by the problem of coping with their first set text, *Elise ou la vraie vie* by Claire Etcherelli. All three students agreed that they couldn't have started to cope with this, or with reading a whole book, in their first month in College. As Jane put it, pleased, nevertheless, with her progress:

> You move from reading a paragraph, which is about five lines in GCSE, and then in a year you're having to read a book, which you don't think is possible at the beginning of the year. At the end of the year you think, "I don't know how I've done it".

Translation The students themselves raised the issue of translation versus reading comprehension as a means of tackling their set text, commenting on the difficulty they had experienced in reading it, but disagreeing among themselves over whether it should be translated. Peter and Mary wanted to translate it all; Jane felt there was not time for this, admitting frankly that she didn't look forward to reading it because "A page takes about half an hour to read in French".

Mary, who really liked *Elise*, found it "so difficult to read at home on my own because it just takes so long ... in places I just get really lost if we don't translate it bit by bit." They all regretted the absence of vocabulary at the back of the book.

Cultural context Jane drew attention to cultural factors as a block to effective reading by stating that the notes after the text were very welcome because they explained cultural features that, not being French, they wouldn't know about otherwise.

All agreed that after one year problems of vocabulary, structure, and cultural differences remained. Jane said that she and other students had found the transition between GCSE and A Level much harder than with English:

> English A Level is more, sort of, a continuation of GCSE, whereas French A Level is completely different to French GCSE..., it's like a transition from reading something like Play School Books to something like Thomas Hardy. It's sort of like that, isn't it? The jump is huge.... It's like jumping into a huge river when it should have been a stream.

All three felt more confident in relation to reading in French after a year, two with reservations. Mary added, "You don't learn anything at all about the foundations in GCSE. I think they missed that bit out."

Easing the transition The Group was fertile in ideas about how to ease the transition from GCSE to A Level in relation to reading:

> As soon as you come in, you could start off with an Easy Reader (e.g. a "baby" Simenon). (Peter)
>
> Something which is perhaps designed for a French child of perhaps eleven or twelve, something like that. (Jane)
>
> Something that you get the satisfaction of saying, "I've read a book in French", even though it's not a particularly good book in French. (Jane)

The students were unclear what a "Reading Course" entailed. Jane felt she needed grammar before reading; she didn't know how it could be done. All three students wanted to read the text in translation (a controversial aspect of language teaching policy). The point of reading the book in translation first was: to get the main idea (Peter); so as not to get the wrong idea and go off at a tangent (Jane and Mary). Mary, who would have liked to work with the text and the translation side by side, also, interestingly, reasoned "so that I can see how the sentences are constructed, how they work out", in other words for syntactical, language-learning reasons too.

Discussion then centred on other aids to reading. Jane said that perhaps what they needed was, "just a paragraph for each chapter, saying roughly what's happened, something like that". Mary suggested a paragraph in simpler French, just giving the main ideas. They agreed that they meant a Reading Key or, instead, a Summary of the theme. I proposed a Reader's Guide, with structuring questions on the text serving as signposts, so that the students would know they were going to cross a certain kind of terrain but would have to identify the actual landmarks for themselves. Only Jane felt she would still be unable to arrive at the answers. Mary added:

> Yes. You need something to make you focus on certain points of the book ... otherwise ... it goes over your head.... if you look at certain bits in more detail, you understand it better and take more in.

All three agreed that their set book would be easier in Term 5 than in Terms 2 and 3 because they would know more structures. The format of a set text was discussed. They liked the idea of a layout with vocabulary on the page itself, as with their Coursebook. They felt it would be helpful to have structures picked out on the page too beside the text. This would spoil the story less than looking them up themselves elsewhere.

With reference to a Reading Skills Course, two students found help with "faux amis" useful, though the third thought it made her over-cautious. They agreed that they looked for key words when reading. Looking at word roots, the use of prefixes, breaking words down into their component parts, etc. was felt to be useful, though the only student to have done any Latin felt it had never helped. These three activities seemed new to the students after their GCSE, although they feature prominently in the "Communication Strategies" section of the NEA Syllabus.

The Syllabus B students

In this account I have conflated groups 2, 3 and 4 consisting of eight students in all. These students agonised less over the adaptation to A Level reading than those with prescribed literature texts, but still felt, in Mark's words, that : "in general terms the actual gap between GCSE and A Level is quite large."

All owned to difficulties with the length of texts and the quantity of new vocabulary. They summed up their feelings as follows:

> GCSE doesn't prepare you at all. (Susan)
>
> Reading is so important for A Level. Such an important part of the course. (Luke)

Text length Students were eloquent on their previous experience of text length: "Just little paragraphs and things." (Martin); "Just little passages, about two paragraphs long. Now we do whole books....we do the whole story" (Ann). Carol had only read comic books at GCSE with very simple vocabulary. Mark, whose reading experience for GCSE had only been through textbook exercises, thought at first:

> The idea of reading literature was a bit frightening in some ways, but now that we've done some and sort of over the year getting introduced to it slowly, the idea of doing it is not such a problem any more.

Vocabulary All noted the volume of new vocabulary that came with A Level. For John the most daunting thing was all the consultations of the Dictionary which were now necessary; the problem would have been even greater with a different textbook and they were grateful for having vocabulary on the page. John was preoccupied with idiomatic French, which he found difficult. He felt that he had been kept away from idiom at GCSE. Others picked up on this point: the language at GCSE, they felt, didn't go beyond how to handle practical situations, and had been lacking in images as well as idioms.

Susan pinpointed the transition in relation to *Orientations*: she found coping with its vocabulary a shock, despite certain similarities to her previous GCSE textbook. Texts were longer and the vocabulary much more extensive. On starting A Level she knew hardly any vocabulary. Her GCSE class hadn't read any books or poems.

Subject matter Carol found *Orientations* unfamiliar at first; she quite liked it, however, because of its contemporary texts. In general, the students regarded it as a good transition. They liked the serial, the "feuilleton", "Une Francaise d'aujourd'hui", which, as Mark put it, "eased you into new things". John said it was, "Corny, but fun because of that and you could go through it progressively; there were lots of useful idiomatic sentences in it." Carol was pleased that topics were now more controversial, while John was delighted that they were more profound and wider-ranging, with themes such as nature, animals and conservation.

Understanding the text Another new aspect for Mark was forming opinions about the French text they read. Working out what the author was trying to say was quite difficult to start off with, but that seemed to be better now. Gordon also referred to his difficulties, his "uncertainty how to pronounce things, what things meant and how the sentences went together, how you were supposed to read them together ... to make something that was sensible, so you would guess.... I got very thrown by the structures and you get very confused by the way they were worded, and you'd end up with the wrong meaning". It had been a matter of reducing and eliminating the guesswork. He had found that the most helpful thing had been his teacher, "just talking us through the difficulties".

Structures had not appeared to create many problems for Syllabus B students, however. I pointed out that *Orientations* did ease you into this aspect of the course, while simultaneously introducing much new vocabulary. The group that had read Roger Vailland's *325000 Francs* as the first book on their Reading Programme, starting in the Spring, felt it would have been impossible at the beginning of the first term. Carol stated that not having learnt the Past Historic yet would have been quite confusing. Susan's alarm on first having the Vailland novel in her hands had abated. Gordon wouldn't have been able to cope with his first whole book in French, *L'Etranger* by Camus, at the start of Term 1, but felt much happier with reading in French after a year:

> I'm not so worried about it now, so that I can enjoy it and I can learn things from it as well ... it's quite satisfying to be able to read a

> magazine and to know that you can actually understand what they are writing about, to understand perhaps a current affairs issue or something and it's about France and that you wouldn't hear in England and you can understand it from a French magazine.

Which syllabus? Mark had opted for the Syllabus without a Literature Paper, wanting French for everyday situations in the French-speaking world. He was also more interested in learning about life in France than analysing books and their writers. Four students were adamant that they had chosen the A Level without Literature because their Syllabus, the B, is more "relevant" nowadays. Carol felt too that with this Syllabus: "It's more reading for pleasure. You can choose what sort of area interests you."

These B Syllabus students, certain they had progressed, now had no qualms about tackling their Reading Programme. Mark said:

> We've been given an insight into what we're going to be doing for our Reading Programme. Having learned so much vocabulary over the first year, it will be a lot easier to read the books.

John thought that via the book he had expanded not only his vocabulary but also his understanding of grammar. He had had difficulty in learning the latter in a set piece lesson, finding it easier to grasp in the context of a text, such as a story. Carol felt that although there are more structures, grammar and vocabulary to cope with than before, "It will come as I go along". Gordon said:

> So far on the reading side I think I've had a good foundation ... to carry on to do the rest of the books [the Reading Programme] I've got to do and to carry on learning.

Easing the transition All three in one group found the Reader they had been given earlier in the year helpful. It was a simplified version of a Simenon story taken from an old O Level book cupboard. Should they have had such a book for GCSE? They said that it could perhaps have provided some psychological benefit, but was not significant for GCSE itself.

Carol voiced the view that reading problems came from the way that GCSE was taught. Their ideas on assistance with reading included giving prior insight into the nature of the subject (Mark), long articles (Gordon), vocabulary on the same page as the text (several students) and a unanimous recommendation of a little story, an Easy Reader with a vocabulary at the back to start with. They liked discussion to make sure they had understood. One student praised from personal experience a simplified version of Maupassant short stories in the TFF (Textes en français facile) series.

Sixth Form teachers would strongly endorse Gordon's comment that anyone starting A Level French should keep the reading going once GCSE is over, and read something in French, anything, in the holidays. Brief and fairly unfocussed discussion of a potential Reading Course encompassed hints on how to read effectively, introductory pointers for reading a book (Carol), "cracking words up into bits" (John), the need for study aids such as a good dictionary, reading chiefly non-fictional materials on current affairs and similar topics. Four students wanted more long(er) extracts from magazines and papers from France and Belgium and texts on controversies as recent as the previous week. Three of the four would like to do more plays in class, each taking parts. They were avid for a wide variety of subject matter and styles.

Language awareness activities such as the above-mentioned "word cracking" were also considered. One student remembered having done some at the College in class, but another from the same group could not recall this and asked what it was. Gordon had noticed that it could be helpful to look at words and work them out by the way they are made up.

Other forms of vocabulary acquisition were also discussed. Susan thought vocabulary tests make you learn it. Might there be other ways of retaining vocabulary? Martin and Luke felt that because you enjoy doing A Level, which is a two-year course, some of it recurs anyway, and also, as Luke put it, "You learn it because you want to speak the language and be coherent in the language and to have the vocabulary to do it".

Synthesis of findings

I was delighted and impressed by the students' relaxed manner, their fluent responses and their reflectiveness on the subject of their own learning processes. Our first-year A Level students knew what reading in French meant to them. It signified practical skills of decoding the text, grasping meaning (rather then creating meanings as they read) and reducing guesswork. It involved grappling with vocabulary and structures. The students were acutely aware when the extraction of meaning was hampered by ignorance of lexical or grammatical items. They were also aware that these needed to be acquired for effective deciphering to proceed, whatever reading purposes they might otherwise have had. Some of the students gave reading in order to acquire language - increasing vocabulary and internalizing new linguistic patterns - as a valid, and sometimes major, reading purpose in its own right.

Without exception our students found the transition from GCSE to A Level difficult at the beginning of the year. This was true of all four GCSE skills. With reference to reading they were shocked at being confronted with longer texts, a wider variety of styles and registers and a massive increase in vocabulary. Their reaction tallied absolutely with my own findings on the areas of mismatch between GCSE and the present A Level objectives. They arrived armed with good GCSE grades, able to cope well with gist comprehension, usually impressively fluent orally in relation to the old 0 Level norm, and bubbling with enthusiasm and confidence. But they also came (and even more so than the first GCSE intake the previous year) with a more limited command of structure. For instance, the Future, Conditional and Pluperfect Tenses had to be taught from scratch before one could begin the A Level Course proper. If structures such as tenses are not known, they cannot be recognised in reading except on the rare occasion when context assists in leading the reader from the surface meaning into the deeper meaning.

The students' interview comments reveal that even the bridging course came as a shock. I was surprised myself that they found texts a page or a page and a half long - which is all they were given for several weeks - quite so taxing. But this is two or three times longer than the longest reading assignment experienced before GCSE. Our practice of mixed mode, rather than discrete skill, exploitation in class may have proved disconcerting to some. In any event the props of the GCSE Defined Content Syllabus with its stress on a delimited and hence circumscribed vocabulary had now been kicked away. At A Level the students could in principle be expected to handle any structure or vocabulary item that was not - by general unwritten consensus among the A Level Boards - regarded as too outlandish to be placed before the candidates.

After a year all the B syllabus students found idioms easier to handle and they were adjusting to the massive increase in vocabulary and text length. They were also happier about extensive reading in French. Topics too were clearly a spur to reading. While their comments with reference to vocabulary and text length echoed those of A Syllabus students with a Literature Paper, they were much less perturbed over difficulties with structures. My own subjective impression was that productive use lagged far behind their receptive skills in this area, however. I was not sure myself whether they had faced up yet to the much greater complexity of structures, but they did not seem unduly worried about these in relation to their reading activity. It should also be recalled that the demands on intensive reading were fewer for their Reading Programme than for the other syllabus with set texts prescribed for literary criticism.

These three B Syllabus groups certainly seemed to be taking the reading demands of A Level French much more in their stride, despite some transitional difficulties, than those from the Literature set, who agonised over the more taxing intensive reading required by their Literature paper. For this very reason their comments on their reading needs were more acute. Their reading purposes were multiple and complex, and so much hinged on "getting it right" for their examinations.

Conclusion

To sum up, the results of my enquiries among the students inevitably lead me towards certain recommendations. During the very early stages of the A Level Course a wide variety of text types is necessary, to provide stimulus and intellectual challenge, and a broad experience of themes, styles and vocabulary. A staged progression in text length is important. Texts should gradually be lengthened from the habitual two to three paragraphs of GCSE to a whole page, thence to two or three pages, then five to ten, then mini-books or Readers, and finally "whole" books. Various kinds of landmarks should be supplied such as breaks in the text, pointers, guiding questions, vocabulary lists and highlighted structures. Reading purposes and reading outcomes should be clearly defined and known to the students before they read.

Readers, which were so positively liked by those students to whom they were issued, and were unanimously recommended by my respondents, represent a reassuring half-way house between the snippet, the short text and the daunting full-length or "whole" book. Some of the old 0 Level ones are not too superannuated. I hope that they are still lurking in stock cupboards, and, provided their readability is high and they are appropriate to the age, aptitude and tastes of the learner, they can be dusted down and brought out again. Ideally Readers should not be "cooked" text, manufactured expressly for language-teaching purposes. Possibilities include texts intended for young French people or published in France for early learners of French as a Second Language; abridged or simplified versions of classics or other full-length books, perhaps with simple monolingual all-French notes and definitions and with the support of glossaries, readers' guides and other study aids. The "Story" offers many attractions: a continuous narrative is important for reading fluency; a human interest angle, suspense, nourishment for the imagination and the sensibilities all motivate the reader. Informative non-fiction books of an appropriate length and level are suitable too, however.

Reading skills strategies should be covered early in the A Level course, starting with (revision of) "Communication Strategies", Section 6 of the NEA GCSE French syllabus, of which, disappointingly, so little use had seemingly been made. Since it is advertised as underpinning the marking scheme for the GCSE Reading Papers, notably at Higher Level, there is considerable incentive to pay it close attention. Students should be trained in effective "text-attack" skills (Grellet 1981; Nuttall 1982). This aggressive term signals the active role of the reader, essential for both learner and teacher to acknowledge if effective reading is to occur.

My findings concerning the students on the two different A Level syllabuses support the concept of an Extensive Reading Programme as against the intensive study of a very few "set texts". However, this programme should be implemented only after the preparatory transitional work on reading skills outlined above.

While a few areas of the mismatch between GCSE and A level came from variations in practices between schools, most stemmed from the differences between the aims and objectives of the two examination systems. Nobody would dispute that their planning was not satisfactorily coordinated by policy makers. A Levels are currently and belatedly being modified to take account of this. Some of the newer ones, such as the new Oxford Syllabus, and those still on the stocks should help to alleviate the problems encountered at this transitional point.

The National Curriculum also attempts to redress the balance in relation to reading. It recommends for the students at GCSE level a richer diet of reading materials in the foreign language. The Report rehabilitates imaginative writing. By Level 10 the pupil should be able to "read with confidence a selected range of fiction, poetry and drama using a dictionary or other reference material as necessary" (National Curriculum Initial Advice 1990, p.74). Private reading in lesson time is recommended, and learners are encouraged increasingly to choose what they read (Initial Advice, pp. 132-3). There is also increased emphasis in the National Curriculum on the development of study skills, with particular reference to reading strategies. Attainment Target 3 is "the ability to read, understand and respond appropriately to written language of various kinds, and to use a variety of reading strategies and information sources" (Initial Advice, p. 60).

Some, but not all, A Level students of French continue the language at University or Polytechnic in some combination or other of subjects, but fewer every year pursue literary studies in French. A Level does not exist purely as a prelude to Degree work, but there needs to be coordination between the two sectors. Concern is expressed, especially in the Universities, about the reading skills of the A Level Product. It is alleged that the fit

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between 18+ and Higher Education is not smooth enough. Educators in Advanced Further Education are currently meeting their first post-GCSE A Level intake: this experience will probably reinforce such criticisms.

In "From School to University" Bagguley states that post-A Level students of French are ill-prepared by schools for reading (Bagguley 1990). Some criticism relates to inability to handle literary texts, but his main point is that first-year undergraduates should already have received "special instruction in independent and guided non-literary reading" (p.5), and that "wider reading and more language work are required before entry to HE" (p.6), with undergraduates wishing they had had "more practice at finding information for oneself" (p.6).

Anthony Lodge (1988) in "Beyond GCSE in French - A University View" says this:

> The literary syllabuses obliged pupils to read texts of reasonable length in the foreign language. Are critical reading skills being developed to the same level in the new A-levels? Are suitable texts available? (p.144)

Teachers in higher education are understandably exercised by the degree of preparedness of students on arrival at their institutions. This may sometimes lead to a neglect of the interests of those in post-16 education who will not be going on to further academic study. Nevertheless, these questions are also relevant to the needs of the latter. Indeed, all the points in the last two paragraphs are extrapolations of issues that I addressed in this study with reference to the earlier transition between GCSE and A Level.

Reading in a foreign language is both a language problem and a reading problem. It was amply demonstrated that my students had acute difficulties with lexis and structure in effecting the transition in reading from GCSE to A Level. How to cope with acquiring these needs to be addressed both in the lead-up to GCSE and also within the A Level course. It should moreover also form part of the student's total foreign language experience, and not be limited to reading alone. I would not argue that A Level language students' problems are those of the early reader; nevertheless

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there are features of reading skills training which benefit both the foreign language reader and the mother tongue reader. Foreign language readers have less time, are subject to a great deal of what Frank Smith termed "noise" and are consequently in need of any effective help that is available to enable them to find their bearings.

It is fitting to conclude with a quotation from Michael Salter, the retiring Staff Inspector, at the JCLA Conference in 1987:

> Reading in the foreign language remains an underestimated skill. Quite apart from any benefits which it brings to other aspects of language learning, it can be a source of pleasure and achievement in itself and remain so throughout adult life. For this to happen, pupils need to acquire rapid reading skills at as early a stage as possible. This can enable them, according to their abilities, to read stories, articles and books in the foreign language at their own rate. (Peck 1988, p.154)

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POPS, PROPS and FOPS: A New Way of Thinking About Readers' Response to Narrative

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In many recent books and articles concerned with the teaching of English we have become familiar with the phrases used by "The Readers' Liberation Movement": the experience of reading ... the reader's own realisation of the text ... the temporal nature of the reading experience ... students actively structure ... how do readers mean ... ? co-creator of the literary work ... the secondary world of the story ... seeing themselves as readers ... and so on.

I am talking, of course, about reader response theory and the growing influence it is having on our classroom practice. This has been reflected in the popularity of such activities as the keeping of reading logs, journals and diaries, as well as the examining boards' stress on personal response. But, excellent as these approaches may be, it seems to me that reader response has put too much emphasis on the reader, to the relative neglect of the text. This has happened in spite of the fact that most influential theorists in this area (e.g. Iser, Rosenblatt) emphasise the reciprocal interaction of readers and texts.

We need, therefore, to redress the balance by developing a way of talking about readers and texts, so that when readers cocreate, experience, realise, structure, and so forth, we are able to say what they are interacting with and how it helps shape them. If we wish to construct a methodology of literature teaching, we must be able to describe both reader and text as integral parts of the reading process.

I would like, here, to suggest a beginning to that enterprise, but before moving on to the present study I will briefly explain the two theoretical bases of my argument.

Anticipation and retrospection

The idea that readers anticipate and retrospect whilst reading is well documented in recent educational literature (e.g. Benton and Fox 1985; Corcoran and Evans 1987). It derives from Benton's (1980) own research and Iser's (1978) theory of the aesthetic response, which say (among other things) that literary texts cannot be grasped as a whole but must be apprehended successively through time. At any one moment while reading, therefore, the reader's experience is the result of "a continuous interplay between modified expectations and transformed memories" (Iser 1978, p 111).

Although this is only one of the several activities that take place when we read fiction, it has attracted a great deal of attention. Protherough (1987) relates the ability to predict certain story outcomes to being an active reader. Those who could predict, for example, that the ending of a story would involve some kind of retribution (even though they could not specify its precise character) seemed to be "conscious of the kind of reflective enactment which they practise in the act of reading" (p 82). Prediction here is seen as part of a more general awareness of the way in which stories work.

In contrast, Benton and Fox (1985) are more analytical. Both anticipation and retrospection are seen as long and short term activities, the short term reflecting our immediate imaginative involvement with the story world and the long term our overall sense of the story shape. For young readers the emphasis is on prediction, retrospection being more sophisticated but, as Iser (1978) points out, a substantial part of both is unconscious.

As teachers of literature we are faced with the two familiar problems: (1) encouraging what is already going on without lapsing into spoon-feeding; and (2) dealing with the largely unconscious experience of story. We have to develop strategies for raising awareness of the syntheses of memory and expectation that readers are already performing, whilst acknowledging the forward-looking pursuit of plot that is encouraged by the conventional structure of the majority of stories for children. I am talking about strategies that can be put into action during reading as opposed to preliminary or follow-up work: logging responses while reading, short term predictions about characters and events, writing the next chapter, inventing a suitable title for a chapter just read, and so on.

Such activities are based on the fact that readers are at a point somewhere between a beginning and an end: they can look forward and they can look back along that continuum. But what exactly are we referring to when we talk of this continuum, or to use a more familiar metaphor for fiction reading, this journey? It is precisely the relationship between the text as a continuum, the reader's experience of the journey and anticipation and retrospection that I would like to examine more closely.

Story and discourse time

I must pause briefly to bring these questions in line with a distinction fundamental to the study of narrative. All narrative is characterised by a dual representation of time. There is the time of the discourse itself - the time it takes to watch a film, see a play or read a book - and there is the time of the worlds constructed by these media, whether it be a split second or hundreds of years. I will refer to these as discourse time and story time after Genette (1980). It is rare that these two times coincide exactly. Imagine a film, for example, lasting two hours and representing two hours of a person's life without omission or pause. The film would distinguish itself by its very lack of temporal restructuring, which would in itself be a powerful though rather extreme narrative device. To return to literature, my point is that deviation from an exact matching of discourse and story times can be regarded as axiomatic, especially in children's literature. It therefore follows that anticipation with respect to discourse time and story time are not the same thing at all (and the same applies to retrospection). On the contrary, I will show that the two time sequences complement each other in important ways.

When we talk about anticipations and retrospections we are referring to the temporal continuum of the discourse, and not the story. We predict the discourse (and its story referents) that we have yet to encounter; we retrospect about the discourse that we have already encountered (and its story referents). In other words, the reader's position vis a vis the discourse determines what is anticipation and what is retrospection. Story time is secondary to this, even though while reading, our thoughts and feelings are expressed in terms of the story world we are creating.

The important point is that when readers anticipate and retrospect along the temporal continuum of the discourse, the temporality of the story world must be taken into account in order to make complete sense of these processes. Turning our attention exclusively towards predictions, three types can now be described:

(1) Past-Oriented Predictions (POPS)
(2) Present-Oriented Predictions (PROPS)
(3) Future-Oriented Predictions (FOPS)

Yet more acronyms, but these, I believe, not only sound more interesting than usual; they are also useful for looking at what readers are doing in relation to the temporal dimensions of fiction. And what better place to start, since we are repeatedly told that fiction reading should be treated as an experience, an event in time (Rosenblatt 1978)? But I will now return to the beginning of my story, as it were, to explain the context for the development of these ideas.

The study

The purpose of my study was to investigate how young readers made sense of prose fiction. Like many other researchers, I chose for convenience to look at short stories, but was keen to develop a new methodology that would emphasise the process of responding and give the readers enough freedom to record the decisions they were making. For example, I did not want to stop and interview readers at predetermined points: I was more interested in where they themselves chose to stop.

After considerable practice, nine readers aged 13-14 were asked to jot down their thoughts and feelings by the side of selected texts as they read. The written form of response was seen as appropriate since I was also interested in how these responses would be developed at later stages. It has been argued (Dias 1986) that the use of writing at this stage lessens the immediacy of the response, being "an act of selecting and composing" (p 44), but as the responses were often telegraphic and expressed in a personal voice, they seemed to differ very little from oral responses in this respect. In fact, as they often implied far more than was overtly stated, it could be argued that they were a very economical way of holding initial impressions, and therefore less of an interference to the reading process.

The second and third stages of the study were pupil-led group discussion and individual oral statements made using a cassette recorder. For present purposes, however, it is the first stage, during reading, that is most important. What follows, then, is only a very small part of a developing line of thought concerned with the description of readers and texts during the act of reading.

POPS, PROPS and FOPS

In this section I will simply define and illustrate these ideas before moving to a consideration of their usefulness. To fully appreciate the examples referred to, the reader is advised to read Leslie Halward's short story "The Breadwinner" which can be found in *Storymakers 3*.

POPS

Past-Oriented Predictions are predictions about subsequent text that recount past story events or states. We would expect them to occur frequently in a murder mystery where the reader is concerned to find out what happened earlier and perhaps shares the protagonist's search for a solution to the mystery. An example less constrained by the conventions of genre would be readers . sponses to John Fowles' novel, *A Maggot*, in which the reader is led to discover what happened to the travellers at the beginning of the story.

Turning to the readers in the study, the following POPS were given in response to the opening paragraphs of "The Breadwinner":

1. Maybe he has been made redundant (Andrew)
2. He is alcoholic and has wasted money several times before (Rebecca)
3. Parents maybe used up what money they had on their son (Pamela)

Several points emerge from these comments. In 1 and 2 story past merges with story present; in 2 and 3 the readers refer to a series of events. As predictions they are voiced with varying degrees of tentativeness, but significantly all go beyond the information offered by the text. Each reader has already started to bring the text alive by means of temporal presuppositions.

PROPS

PROPS are predictions about present states or events. "The Breadwinner" opens thus: "The parents of a boy of fourteen were waiting for him to come home with his first week's wages".

On the basis of this, several of the readers tried to establish other features of the story present:

4. A part-time job (Justin)
5. A poor family (Ben)
6. Like they don't earn money as they are both at home (Pamela)
7. Maybe they are very poor (Andrew)

Each of these comments is wide in its temporal span, although to varying degrees. The attribute of "poverty" is likely to span the whole of story time, or at least a large portion of it, except perhaps in the event of a fairy tale transformation. Pamela's comment (6), on the other hand, is more cautious, in that it describes an on-going state of affairs that is more liable to change.

FOPS

FOPS accord with our common sense notions of prediction. They predict events or states that are potentially part of story future:

8. He'll get violent (Emma)
9. Is there going to be a fight? (Rebecca)
10. He's going to get a licking (Justin)

All these examples occurred at the moment of the father's threatening behaviour towards his son about half way through the text, and the predictions were all short term.

Implications for response theory

The main advantage of looking at responses in this way is that it enables us to compare the text's temporal organisation with the operations the reader performs on the text while reading. Narratologists have shown that it is possible to abstract the temporality of the story world through detailed analysis of text (e.g. Verrier 1983; Revell 1988). In a different way, the reader reconstructs this temporality while reading, bringing to the text powerful models of time and sequence in the "real" world, as well as models of how texts conventionally deal with time. What we need to ask, therefore, is how this reconstruction takes place both as the story unfolds with the text and after the text has been read. What, for example, does the reader do when story time stops as in a descriptive pause? Do certain readers automatically read any text according to the shape of an acquired temporal model? Or do readers learn to adapt to different kinds of text? Clearly, the questions I am asking concern far more than temporal organisation; they overlap, for example, with the kinds of questions Robert Protherough asks about readers' spatial location within the story world. However, confining the discussion to the temporal for the sake of clarity, let us look at specific examples from the present study.

Three stories were studied: "The Breadwinner", "Pattern" by Fred Brown and "Cat in the Rain" by Hemingway. The most marked difference in the organisation of time was in the opening lines. "The Breadwinner" sets the context within a sequence that describes the parents waiting for their son to come home. The opening paragraph forewarns the reader of this waiting, thus precluding questions about the immediate story future. From there, the narrator is positioned as an astute observer of the family and it is the limited nature of this position that stimulates the reader to various kinds of activity:

11. Doesn't she like him? (Emma)
12. I bet he's drunk, he sounds like it. (Vicki)
13. This may have happened before and he spends the money at a halfway house and not on food. (Pamela)
14. They argue frequently (Rebecca)

In every case the reader steps outside the temporal (and spatial) limitations of the textual point of view, "completing" the story with a variety of projections. These are about either on-going states of affairs or recurring events in the past or present. Already the story is part of a much larger story that has its own shape and in turn will shape readers' responses to the text to come and be modified by it.

With this and the other two stories there was a predominance of PROPS, but with the following differences: "Cat in the Rain" separates context from events at the beginning and accordingly the readers were concerned with establishing the immediate context rather than prior or subsequent events. in "Pattern" which begins *in medias res*, there was a much narrower concern with the events already in train. But none of the story openings gave rise to FOPS. Before readers can predict a story future they must predict their way into its present and, if necessary, its past, in order to find the familiar.

Once the story has moved beyond its beginning and the reader has established the direction of that movement, there is a decline in the opening surge of responses - a surge that represents the reader's coming to terms with the relationship between discourse and story. But, relatively speaking, FOPS are now much more likely to occur, even though their overall level of occurrence is low. Only one particular incident gives rise to a high degree of concurrence between readers with respect to FOPS: shortly before the boy's beating by the father in "The Breadwinner", several readers predicted that this would happen (see examples 8, 9, and 10 above). Predictions about what will happen (as opposed to what will be revealed) were much less frequent than might have been expected, suggesting that much of what we conventionally call predictions is concerned with POPS and PROPS - our presuppositions about characters' hypothetical pasts, and our stepping outside the constraints of the point of view offered by the text.

It is clear, then, that predictions are not necessarily about story future. But examples occurred where predictions were not about text-to-come either. At the end of "Pattern" Vicki asked: "Is she going to kill the monsters?" - a FOP - but Vicki knew that she was not going to get any answers to this except by re-reading the text or discussing it with others. This requires an important modification in our thinking about predictions,for here they seem to take on the nature of hypotheses to be carried forward by the reader and "tested" against the text in whatever classroom activity follows the initial reading, whether this is another reading, a group discussion or creative writing. In this way initial responses become a part of the text to be read on subsequent encounters.

Towards reader style

Temporal re-shaping of the story throughout the process of responding can tell us a lot about what the reader brings to the text. I will again cite the example of Vicki, whose desire to experience closure in reading a short story manifested itself in two different ways according to the degree of closure already perceived in the different stories.

Firstly, with "Pattern" closure did not seem apparent to Vicki and she therefore provided the event that for her completed the action of the story. In "Cat in the Rain", however, because the end was seen as having closure, Vicki re-shaped other parts of the story backwards to three years prior to its start, supposing the death of a cat; she accounted for the rather unsatisfying ending by suggesting that the story is part of a recurring story cycle; and she adopted the point of view of two characters which the text presents only from the outside. In contrast, the same reader's responses to "The Breadwinner" sought no major temporal re-shaping. Instead this story, which has a sharp sense of reversal and then closure, drew from her a parallel with another story she had encountered:

> My goodness. This is similar to this film I saw in the holidays. The dad was really horrible and the boy shot his dad. It was really good. In the end the boy got sent to jail.

Here there is a sense of safety in a familiar structure that Vicki sees as common to the two texts.

Thus Vicki's apparently very different responses to the three stories can be understood by applying the concept of closure both to the texts and to the responses themselves. What is revealed is a characteristic style relating the form of the original text to the form of the response. Or, to use a structuralist term, what we are perhaps beginning to glimpse is a part of Vicki's literary competence.

Conclusions

There are several theoretical and practical gains to be made from this line of enquiry. POPS, PROPS, and FOPS show that it is possible to use narratology in the precise description of the form that responses take during reading. The development of concepts that adapt textual analysis to phenomenological process opens the way for a description of reading that is truly interactive. Texts can be shown to have pre-existing structure whilst, using the same terms, readers are seen to be re-shaping this structure in the act of reading.

The expanded sense of prediction, as developed in this paper, suggests refinements to classroom activities that involve pupils in predicting. Releasing the concept of prediction from its simplistic equation with "What happens next?" has two important consequences. Firstly, it means that we can give more attention to interaction between the temporality of the secondary world as suggested by the text and as realised by the reader. Secondly, it enables us to see predictions as continuous with classroom activities that take place subsequent to reading. These activities thereby become an integral part of reading itself rather than an addendum to it. Finally, an important rider to all of this is that we must not achieve descriptive rigour by reducing reading to a set of narratologically derived categories. Nevertheless, the response theorists' preoccupation with the experience of reading suggests that the narratological organisation of time is an appropriate place to begin this line of enquiry.

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Reading Media Texts: Media, Imagination and National Curriculum English

Andrew Hart

Whilst Prince Charles and others have complained about the threats to our literary heritage which National Curriculum English poses, many teachers are concerned, on the contrary, that its assumptions about reading are far too traditional. The Statements of Attainment invoke the familiar concepts of attentiveness, fluency, expressiveness, inference and personal response as being central to reading literary texts for enjoyment and understanding. But when "non-literary and media texts" are discussed, there is an implicit assumption that some form of rhetorical conspiracy is at work. Suddenly, reading becomes a defensive strategy against the manipulations of the mass media. In spite of the fact that "reading" is now often used metaphorically to refer to viewing and listening processes, the architects of National Curriculum English would apparently prefer the word to be used only in relation to **written** texts.

It is almost as if texts demand completely different critical approaches according to whether they are factual or fictional. According to this simple view, facts are things which have happened and fiction is something which has been made (up). Facts are "out there" waiting to be reported and reflected on. The epistemological and philosophical problems which this common sense view ignores are vast. It is not my intention to discuss them here, but I do want to suggest some of the possibilities for looking at fictional media texts in the same way and for the same reasons as literary texts.

I want to argue that our essential task as English teachers is not to make qualitative distinctions between literary and media texts nor to place them on some form of hierarchical scale: rather, to help students learn how to evaluate for themselves any kind of text according to content and context. To illustrate this, we shall first examine some of the issues surrounding imaginative engagement with texts, then discuss some of the threats posed to children by "dangerous" texts (like "video nasties" and comics) or by unchallenging, complacent ones (like *Neighbours*) and finally look at ways in which new methods for developing literary response can easily be deployed with media texts.

The National Curriculum Attainment Targets place great stress on the need for students to distinguish between facts and opinions. This concern seems to derive from a model of media texts as inherently deceptive and manipulative, as may be seen from the following selection:

National Curriculum English Attainment Target 2 (Reading) (Levels 5-10)

Pupils should be able to...

5c show in discussion that they can recognise whether subject-matter in non-literary and media texts is presented as fact or opinion....

6c show in discussion and in writing that they can recognise whether subject-matter in non-literary and media texts is presented as fact or opinion, identifying some of the ways in which the distinction can be made....

7c show in discussion that they can recognise features of presentation which are used to inform, to regulate, to reassure or to persuade, in non-literary and media texts....

8c show in discussion and in writing an ability to form a considered opinion about features of presentation which are used to inform, reassure or persuade in non-literary and media texts....

9c show in discussion and in writing an ability to recognise techniques and conventions of presentation in non-literary and media texts, and judge the effectiveness of their use....

10c show in discussion and in writing an ability to evaluate techniques and conventions of presentation in non-literary and media texts, and judge the effectiveness of their use....

10d select, retrieve, evaluate and combine information independently and with discrimination, from a comprehensive range of reference materials, making effective and sustained use of the information.

(DES 1990: 3-11)

Knowing about the context of production and consumption ot texts is a necessary basis for understanding how to read them. The fact that texts are constructed rather than discovered is central to the process of reading.

> In the arrangement of the image, in the re-shooting, in the intervention of the director and the cameraman to place and to move elements within the frame, according to some unspecified and perhaps unconscious rhetoric, [images] have to speak and to emphasise an aspect of that reality which is claimed to be significant. (Silverstone 1985: 77)

All media texts depend in some way on pre-determined scripts, whether they are formalised on the page or only floating in producers' heads. But the dependence of different media forms on scripts varies. In fact, we can think of the apparent opposites of fact and fiction as existing on a continuum rather than as mutually exclusive opposites.

In television and radio, for example, news is at one (re-active) extreme and drama at the (pro-active) other. Most documentaries are pre-scripted to the extent that they use fictional techniques of presentation to dramatise factual information. Even when this is not so, documentary makers inevitably approach their subjects with their own agendas and structures, even though they might be unaware of them. The extent to which this happens in news has been the subject of great debate over the last twenty years, as the work of the Glasgow University Media Group testifies. Advertising is a highly pre-scripted form but because it also claims to be "reporting" and offering information about products and services, it also has some of the surface features of documentary.

Ironically, the media themselves confuse the issue by going to great lengths to distinguish factual information from opinion. They also use all sorts of familiar codes to signal when they are dealing with facts. On television, features like Standard English speech, smart clothing and electronic office hardware all assert that we are in the presence of responsible and reliable reporting rather than the realms of fiction or political propaganda. "There is no fraudulence here.... It cannot be otherwise" (Silverstone 1985: 77).

Selectivity and editing are inherent in any act of perception or narration. This can be easily demonstrated by listening to how people describe things or relate events. Their personalities, interests and immediate contexts play a large part in determining what is left out, what is put in and how it is ordered. But when the media report information something else is also happening. There are additional levels of editing which are not directly dependent on the personal views and contexts of reporters. Written journalism often shows traces of the way personality is stamped on stories and newspapers have acknowledged political stances which are usually shared by their readers. Indeed, the politics of newspapers remain a very significant factor in readers' purchasing decisions.

The reasons for the particular emphases on certain kinds of reading can be interestingly traced back to the politics of the Education Reform Act of 1988 and the motivations behind the National Curriculum. The questions which the Cox Report proposes as central to the study of any text ("who is communicating with whom and why; how has the text been produced and transmitted; how does it convey its meaning?" [DES 1989 7.23]) are questions which we should be asking about the National Curriculum itself.

When Kenneth Baker was Secretary of State for Education, he wrote a short article (*Sunday Times*, 28 February 1988) which clearly expressed his own views about children, fiction and imagination. He noted with pleasure that Shakespeare is alive and well in theatres, on television, on video and on radio up and down the land. But he argued that none of this could compare with **reading** Shakespeare.

Kenneth Baker's prejudices about non-literary media are worth noting more fully, since they are still shared by many others, including some teachers.

> Children watch too much television... I find this depressing. Literature, the reading of good books, is in many important ways a superior, richer and deeper experience than watching television. A particular feature of the written or spoken word is the unique demand it makes upon the imagination. (Baker 1988)

There is no doubt that television is the most popular medium amongst children. There are currently about 9 million four to fifteen year-olds (about 17% of the population) but at peak viewing times they constitute a third of the total audience. This pattern varies according to the season. In Winter, for example 74% of four to seven year-olds are watching at 4pm on weekdays, while only half that number watch at the same time in Summer. Children between four and twelve watch an average of five programmes each day and within this age-band, the heaviest viewing is by seven to nine year-olds in families from social classes D and E. As children get older, they watch less television and, for some reason, develop a preference (most pronounced amongst male viewers) for BBC programmes (Wober 1986).

The pervasiveness of television in society is also mirrored in schools. Over 98% of primary and 99% of secondary schools have at least 1 colour television: 78% & 99% have VCRs (BBC 1987). So even though some of the traditional hostility to television amongst teachers may remain, perhaps attitudes are changing (Davies 1989: 119). Whatever an ideal curriculum might prescribe, we have to face the fact that children experience a wide range of media texts, most of which are encountered outside the classroom. This fact needs to be recognised in what and how we teach.

No-one would deny the importance of imagination or its potential engagement through literature. But it is a matter of degree, not kind. All media experiences involve children in imaginative work, whether as readers, viewers, listeners, speakers or writers. As the Cox Report reminds us, "children construct the world through story" (DES 1989: 7.1).

Children and media: dangerous liaisons?

> Audiences are not the passive victims of scheduling decisions, and they do discriminate, often in very discerning ways, between different examples of the same genre. (Buckingham 1987: 4)

All three of Britain's major soaps are broadcast during family viewing hours before the 9 o'clock "watershed". They all (particularly *Neighbours*) have some appeal for children. They all depend on the imaginative involvement of viewers. But soaps are not all the same and their different appeals are reflected in the composition of their audiences. One third of the *Neighbours* audience, for example, is 15 or under.

Recent public discussion of children and television in Britain has been dominated by fear of television's potentially harmful effects. The group of teachers who reported to the DES in 1983 were worried that children routinely watched adult programmes containing incidents and values which might be considered harmful to them.

Debate has been quickened by hysteria over so-called "video nasties" which led to the 1984 Video Recordings Act. Similarly, concern about changes in the structure of broadcasting in Britain (especially the role of satellite and cable) has produced the Broadcasting Standards Council. Whilst Kenneth Baker has been concerned with the alleged failure of television to engage the imagination and make demands on children, others have been worried about the dangers of their imaginations being over-involved. This is particularly so with erotic and/or violent material, especially when it is experienced in a normally protected domestic context. The dangers arise, it is argued, because of the special power of visual imagery and the degree of imaginative involvement it produces: children identify with, absorb and imitate the behaviour they see on television. As a result, their own characters and the general social and cultural life of their society are damaged.

> The excessive time spent on watching television creates a situation similar to that of a child living on a diet of one single food such as meat pies or chicken. Whereas meat pies and chicken are good foods when integrated into a complete, nutritious diet, when eaten exclusively they do not provide the variety of nutrients needed for healthy development. Similarly, if children spend most of their leisure time simply watching television, no matter how good the programmes, their growth will be stunted because they are not getting the rich variety of experiences and activities which are necessary for healthy physical, psychological and mental development. (Horsfield 1986: 53)

Arguments about effects have been running for decades and have never been satisfactorily resolved. Most recently, in the debate over "video nasties", researchers like Cumberbatch and Barker have shown how careful we need to be in accepting some of the findings of of people like Clifford Hill and his colleagues (Barker 1984a, 1984b; Cumberbatch 1989; Hill 1985). The Parliamentary Group Video Enquiry (whose title implied but did not carry any Parliamentary authority) suggested that large numbers of very young children were being harmed as a result of watching "video nasties". But their methods and data were unreliable. Much of their work was based on problem families listed by the NSPCC. They also relied on self-completed questionnaires which allowed children to claim they had seen non-existent videos. And their use of those titles reported to the Director of Public Prosecutions as a means of categorising "video nasties" (even though many of these had not been prosecuted, let alone convicted) led them into some bizarre inclusions like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

> Most people (75%) think that there is more violence on television now than there was about ten years ago. However, most people are mistaken. Violence and concerns about violence have clearly increased in society in the last decade but this has not been reflected by a proportional increase on television.... (Cumberbatch 1987: 41)

There is a danger of children being exposed to potentially disturbing situations which they are unable to understand and cope with. But there is a greater danger of assuming the existence of effects which are not demonstrable, of ignoring other relevant variables and of making television the scape-goat for all society's ills. We have to ask what consequences we could reasonably expect to occur if television could somehow be magically removed from the calculation.

> Television is not all-powerful. It can provide examples of some of life's possibilities for children. It can give them ideas for play and satisfy some of their curiosity for knowledge. But it cannot play for them. Similarly, it can show them how other people, including "bad" people, behave, but it cannot bring them up to be nice or nasty people. Only families and communities can do that. (Davies 1989: 28)

There are undoubtedly large variations in individual learning styles and strategies. It is therefore important to relate the study of children's responses to television more closely to relevant general theories of learning. These would then provide a sounder basis for conducting effective research.

If we think of the viewing process as an interactive one, we can shift the focus away from medium and message towards children as viewers. We can see children as active participants in the making of meaning. Meaning becomes the product of an interaction between programmes and viewers rather than a fixed property of the programmes. Traditional effects research focuses on audiences as passive objects. But this approach emphasises the role of audiences as informed subjects who respond actively to what they see.

Some researchers have found that children's responses are active, thoughtful and sophisticated (Palmer 1986; Hodge and Tripp 1986).

> They act like it's really happening, they get really into what they're acting... they don't just stand there and say something... They act it and they sort of feel it, and so you feel it as well, so you get into the show with them. (Annette [11] on *Sons and Daughters* in Palmer 1986: 42-3)

The Cox Report recognised the importance for children of interacting with texts and that reading should therefore be tied in with other forms of active response.

> Children should experiment... with dramatic improvisations of the stories they read and write; they should experience and take part in the performance of poetry; they should listen critically to radio plays. (DES 1989: 7.8)

But to imagine that more than a handful of young people are listening to radio plays is at best wishful thinking and at worst naive. Young people's use of radio is largely confined to listening to popular music presented by fast talking DJs. This kind of radio is not generally seen as presenting the range of fictional forms which we have noted in television. And yet a closer look at the schedules for Radio 1 or an average local commercial radio station would reveal the use of a whole range of story forms which appear to have strong audience appeal. Programme trails, advertisements and public information campaigns often use short narrative forms to underscore their messages. And large audiences have been achieved by DJs, able to create a good running story as a back-drop to the records. Furthermore, many of the conventions of soap opera are used in one of Radio 1's most popular features *Our Tune*, where DJ Simon Bates extemporises tales of tragedy and romance woven from letters sent in by listeners. *Our Tune* is a kind of "soap operetta" characterised by gossipy accessible language, careful scene-setting, detailed narration of dramatic moments, essential bridging passages and simple moralising. Such examples show how popular radio can provide a useful and easily accessible source of fictional forms. Understanding how these forms use the radio conventions of words, music, sounds and silence in order to stimulate the theatre of the mind, could be the starting point for more complex work on "reading" radio.

Popular television drama

> Most people spend more time watching various kinds of drama than in preparing and eating food. (Williams 1974: 59-60)

Fiction currently constitutes over 35% of peak-time television output. The "continuous serial" (now most often known as "soap opera", from the early days of American radio) has been one of the great popular successes of television. A total of about 80 million person-hours is spent watching soap opera each week.

Granada's *Coronation Street* has run for over 30 years and has only recently been matched in popularity by BBC's *EastEnders* and the imported *Neighbours*. Such serials are crucial for television companies because they reduce financial risks when compared with single plays or films. They are cheap to produce (because of savings made on recurrent settings and actors) and provide a constant supply of loyal viewers.

What is it that makes soaps so attractive to viewers? What special pleasures do they offer? Characterisation is limited mostly to "flat" serial types from three generations, but with more individualised or "rounded" central characters. The stability of the communities they create, the predictability of plot developments and their recurrent transmission times (with omnibus repeats) are all important aspects of their appeal and help maintain audience loyalty.

Unlike documentaries and detective stories, soaps typically flatter viewers by inviting them to see themselves as "in the know", with a mastery of specialised social knowledge about characters and events in the serial. Another pleasure offered by soaps has been established only recently through observation of viewers in their own homes and detailed discussions with groups of viewers about television. That is the ease with which television can be used like radio as a secondary medium and allow partial attention to something else (Taylor and Mullan 1986: 154).

Soaps also benefit from their symbiotic relationship with the press. The tabloid newspapers currently employ more than more than forty journalists as full-time television reporters (Taylor and Mullan 1986: 177). As a result of their attentions, the lives of serial characters are publicised and amplified in the press. And the lives of the actors are implicated in a curious parallel world which is neither quite factual nor entirely fictional: "Always the same, always changing..." (Geraghty 1981: 22).

The appeal of continuous serials is mainly to the known and familiar. But there is much more to them than that. Surprise and suspense are also built into their narratives to raise curiosity and retain interest. Their success depends on a subtle blend of continuity with change. The televisual language of British soaps is very much based on naturalistic conventions.

They rely heavily on the context of the nuclear family in established domestic interiors or communal spaces like shops, pubs and cafes.

> The lighting is usually flat, without harsh shadows; the camerawork is generally static and unobtrusive, with close-ups and tracking shots used only rarely; the editing follows the rules of standard continuity editing.... (Buckingham 1987: 74)

EastEnders is more complex in its plotting than *Neighbours*. It also has a low frequency of dramatic incidents in comparison with other soaps, but still creates an impression of fast action and excitement. It does so by creating a density of texture in both its content and style. For example, it offers a multiplicity of characters and frequent shifts of location. It often refers backwards, forwards and sideways, not only to restate what viewers already know but make us "work harder" at reading the text. It has a higher than usual number of major simultaneous story-lines (5-6 on average compared with 3 in *Coronation Street* or *Brookside* and often less in *Neighbours*). The camera work is highly mobile and creates a sense of bustle which is sometimes restless and disturbing (like *Hill Street Blues* or *Making Out*). This business is also reinforced by the density of atmospheric background sound (again, in stark contrast with the suburban silence of *Neighbours*) (Buckingham 1987: 54-55).

Like other soaps, *EastEnders* creates a sense of life being lived at normal pace, in parallel with the audience's social experience. Its rhythm and continuity partly depend on a recurrent diurnal structure punctuated by pub opening hours and much meal-taking.

> There is a density of naturalistic detail in the background sound and in the design of sets and costumes, and a distinct lack of opulence. Above all, much of the action is resolutely mundane: the characters do their laundry, go shopping, cook and eat meals, go to the lavatory, take their dogs for walks and make endless cups of tea. (Buckingham 1987: 74)

Whilst some critics argue that soaps only deal with trivia, there can be no doubt that *EastEnders* engages with major social issues. Its very title and location depend implicitly on a concern with class. It constantly dramatises events which arise from the clash between a traditional working class community and the demands of a more diverse modern society. That society is also a multi-cultural one and so racial issues inevitably arise.

Yet, as with the representation of class, there is a lack of reference to broader structural inequalities. This results in the creation of an apparent oasis of multi-racial harmony. Whilst *Coronation Street* undoubtedly explores different models of femaleness, *EastEnders* is more concerned with examining the traditional masculine roles.

Whatever particular concerns are addressed and however fluently they are blended into the daily life of Albert Square, the central questions are about **representation**. How are ambiguities, problems and conflicts actually dealt with in the programme? What overall views of social groups and the role of individuals within them emerge?

> To what extent does *EastEnders* seek to construct an artificially harmonious community, and thereby to efface fundamental differences and inequalities, particularly those based on class and ethnicity? (Buckingham 1987: 94)

In spite of the popularity of soaps, some critics maintain that their predictability and sentimentality are dangerous. Threats from outside are constantly repelled or neutralised by the internal stability and strengths of the dominant community and its appeal to "common sense". If familiar problems are resolved in an unchallenging way, the danger is that the solutions will be ones which maintain the *status quo*. So the characteristic structures of feeling and ideas will be conservative.

But it is not just the way that the characters are presented, the stories structured and the central problems resolved which raises questions about ideology. Equally important is what is **missing** from soaps. The absence of disturbing elements which may occur in actual social experience may be what gives some soaps like *Neighbours* their particular appeal for children. Yet we cannot be concerned simply with the apparent characteristics of television texts. We need to examine how audiences actually respond to them and make sense of them.

Reading and responding

> An active involvement with literature enables pupils to share the experience of others. They will encounter and come to understand a wide range of feelings and relationships by entering vicariously the world of others, and in consequence, they are likely to understand more of themselves. (DES 1989: 7.3)

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The Cox Report is curiously ambivalent about non-literary fiction. It seems to assume, as we noted initially, that non-literary texts are dangerous or worthless. The reference to radio plays cited above is an isolated one. Why not consider seriously the non-literary fiction which we know most young people enjoy and respond to? There is no doubt that some childish (and adult) pleasures involve the consumption of formulaic, pulp-written material which is often mindless and sometimes potentially dangerous or disturbing. Such material cannot be ignored and yet the type of hysteria noted earlier, which the so-called "video nasties" provoked, is neither helpful nor appropriate. Learning how to make mature judgements about a range of fiction is an important part of growing up. Studying the media can help by encouraging students to develop a language through which they can begin to understand their own responses to texts.

So first of all we need to acknowledge the validity of young people's individual responses to fiction and to accept that, in the case of comics for example, these will differ from adult interpretations and vary from person to person. By experiencing fiction in this way young people begin to develop their own value systems. So good Media Education should provide an opportunity for students to talk about their understanding of media texts and to recognise the features of different kinds of material. In this way, students can develop their own evaluation of texts and a language through which to express it. The wider the range of material to which they are exposed, the greater their understanding is likely to be. Of course, at every age there are judgements to made about the appropriateness of material but these need to be thought out in a context which acknowledges the fact that children's individual tastes and pleasures vary and that their responses will almost always differ from adults.

Many studies have been carried out on how individual and small groups of children read and respond to writing. Reader-response approaches have provided many insights into reading processes and imaginative responses among children. These approaches have already been adopted in some schools as good classroom practice in the teaching of literature as well as being recognised formally within National Curriculum English (DES 1989: Appendix 6: "Approaches to the Class Novel").

Reader-response approaches are based on the notion that readers are active meaning makers who use a range of strategies (introspection, retrospection, anticipation) to travel in the "secondary worlds" of fiction. Every text offers "gaps" which readers are invited to explore and fill with their own speculations as the text unfolds. Every reader embarks on a journey of discovery which involves such processes as prediction, surprise, shock, accommodation, integration, disappointment and the satisfaction of fulfilled expectations.

Several techniques have been developed by researchers to record secondary responses to poems and fiction and some of them are also usable in the classroom. For example, readers can "map" their own reading routes, tape-record a running commentary on their reactions as they read, write notes around poems or draw diagrams. With novels, it can be done by stopping at pre-determined points to make jottings or record initial reactions to a sequence or make predictions about how the narrative is likely to develop. In addition, it is possible to extend this into group discussion or more extended and reflective personal writing.

There are clearly formal and presentational differences between writing and other media. Some researchers argue that these differences explain how and why attention is given or withheld.

> Like travel, television narrows the mind.... The difference between television and literature is fundamental. When we read a book we enter into a secret intimacy with the author, an intimacy... between strangers. We form our own images in our heads. But when we watch television we all plug ourselves into our sets and collectively receive identical images. (Holroyd 1982)

Literature and television both rely on signs and codes which are apprehended visually (although television has a simultaneous and sometimes counterpointed auditory channel). Clusters of words on the page or patterns of dots on the screen are the material forms which generate meaning. But is there an essentially subjective imaging process which occurs in reading which does not occur in viewing? Does it actually matter that some of the signs used by television are already themselves visual? All media allow some degree of freedom to choose what to attend to within the text, so that variations of response will occur. At the same time, it cannot be denied that audiences come to every media text with their personal memories, some of which are activated by viewing, listening or reading, so that meaning is inevitably a matter for negotiation which will differ between individuals.

There is no doubt that television narratives and other forms of popular fiction found in comics and magazines have a powerful formative influence on children's writing. If we want to know more about the sense which they make of soaps, for example, and how they incorporate them into their personal agenda, we can look carefully at the narratives they create for themselves. Frequently, children's writing shows the marks of derivation from television soaps. Some teachers will disapprove of writing based on soaps because they find it derivative. But the use of such models does not necessarily mean thoughtless reproduction of formula fiction or enslavement to a fixed set of values. Instead of making automatic assumptions about the inferiority of such forms, we could be helping children to write authentically by recognizing and understanding the codes and conventions which they draw upon.

Just as English has much to learn from Media Education, so too reader-response approaches can be effectively used with non-literary media. Recent studies have shown increasing critical powers amongst children who have been taught in a constructive way about media (Davies 1989: 131). The role of Media Education, like that of English, is to help children to enjoy a wide range of media and to be aware of how they work. We need to accept the validity of the specific meanings which young readers create through their reading of, for example, comics and magazines. Only then can they develop into readers who can make their own sophisticated judgements about texts. Ultimately, they should be able to speak independently and with confidence about the characteristic forms and pleasures of a whole range of different texts. This process necessarily involves them in becoming more active media readers and audiences. As they become increasingly able to create a critical distance between themselves and the media texts they value, they are moving towards the kind of autonomy which is the main aim of Media Education.

> ... we should broaden our notions of what constitutes useful and interesting writing, and include within that writing based on popular fiction. Once we start to take [it] seriously, there would be other consequences for our practice. We could encourage children to articulate what they already know about how such fictions work and help to refine that knowledge.... This might involve using some of the critical strategies commonly associated with Media Studies, asking such questions as: How does this piece come to have meaning? What is its purpose, and how has it been produced? But we would do this for different reasons. Rather than using such questions to focus pupils' attention on how they are being manipulated or worked on by the text... the point would be to enable pupils to manipulate the rules of the text's construction for themselves. (Moss 1989: 117-18)

This call for a broadening of our understanding of writing is only minimally present in National Curriculum English, but it usefully reminds us of how closely reading and writing are related. For in the end, reading media, like reading literature, is not a passive absorption in or even interaction with texts, but an active engagement with institutions, as the definition of Media Education adopted by the Cox Report makes clear:

> Media Education... seeks to increase children's critical understanding of the media.... (It) aims to develop systematically children's critical and creative powers through analysis and production of media artefacts.... Media Education aims to create more active and critical media users who will demand, and could contribute to, a greater range and diversity of media products. (DES 1989: 9.6)

If one of the purposes of literature is to challenge readers to travel beyond themselves and, perhaps, to be disturbed into "critical thinking about existing stereotypes and values" (DES 1989: 7.4), there must also be a place for such challenge by non-literary texts. Reading, whatever the materials, should never be completely comfortable.

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Looking at Paintings : Representation and Response

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Representation and response

Writing about the art of making images, Gombrich (1960, p. 98) quotes a celebrated remark by Matisse : "When a lady visiting his studio said, 'But surely, the arm of this woman is much too long', the artist replied politely, 'Madam, you are mistaken. This is not a woman, this is a picture'." This exchange focusses upon my purposes in this paper which concern two fundamental concepts we need to keep in mind when working with pictures : representation and response. Perhaps the most important contribution to visual theory since E.H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* - the significance of which has been likened by one recent commentator as comparable to that of Reynolds' *Discourses* two centuries earlier (Bryson 1991, p. 62) - is Richard Wollheim's *Art and its Objects* (1980, 2nd edn.) and his *Painting as an Art* (1987). His second chapter in the latter book, "What The Spectator Sees", concentrates on issues of visual experience which Gombrich had earlier addressed in the corresponding chapter, "The Beholder's Share", of his classic study. Both write in the mainstream perceptualist tradition as distinct, for example, from semiological approaches (Bryson 1991) to visual representation, or to approaches which resist the idea that representation is grounded in perception or in our phenomenological experience of the world, in favour of defining it according to the historical conditions of its origin and reception (Nochlin 1991).

The two main theoretical questions posed by mainstream theory that have been paramount since *Art and Illusion*, according to Michael Podro (1991, p. 165) are, first, "How is it that we can convincingly show the look of the three-dimensional moving world on what we are still aware of as a still two-dimensional surface?"; and, secondly, "How does the presence of the surface and the facture of the paint enter our awareness of the subject depicted upon it?". Wollheim's answer (to which Podro's own seems remarkably similar) lies in his concept of "seeing-in".

Seeing-in is an experience any visitor to an art gallery will have had who has spent time gazing at a particular painting, occasionally moving in close, or adjusting the angle of viewing. It is to have a dual-aspect yet unitary experience in response to a painting. It is unitary in that the viewer's absorption in the image is inclusive of two features : the viewer sees both the depicted objects or figures, yet also sees the marked surface as evidenced in say, the brush strokes, the density of the texture, the cracks in the paint, the glare, and so on. Wollheim argues that the connection between representation and seeing-in is essential. Writing about how painters achieve naturalistic effects, he says : "Specifically, we need to invoke the phenomenology of seeing-in : two-foldness" (Wollheim 1987, p.72). He calls the two complementary aspects of seeing-in, the recognitional aspect where the spectator discerns something in the marked surface, and the configurational aspect which indicates the spectator's awareness of the marked surface *per se*. Both aspects of this two-foldness operate in the spectator together, and it is this simultaneous awareness of "a depicted subject" and "the marked surface" which ensures that the framed scene registers both in depth and as flat.

Literature teachers may register both a recognition and a cause for unease at this point. We feel on familiar territory when seeing-in appears to be a similar process to the one young readers undergo during the initial stages of learning to read. Constructing a meaning and decoding print are analogous in their two-fold nature to the recognitional and configurational aspects of Wollheim's concept. The likeness is unsurprising since contemporary reading theory is based on a largely psychological account of how we make textual meaning, and Wollheim's visual theory is similarly one that is "committed to a psychological account of pictorial meaning" (Wollheim 1987, p. 306). Reading - whether a painted image or a written text - seemingly involves a dual engagement with the substance and the medium. The unease arises when we then ask whether this dual engagement of Wollheim's "two-foldness" is, in fact, simultaneous. For what actually happens when we look at a painting and become aware of both the depicted subject matter and the marked surface, is that the mind shuttles rapidly back and forth between the two. As Gilbert Ryle (1949) has pointed out, "we cannot attend twice at once"; but what the mind can do is to switch perspective with remarkable speed and facility. Is not Wollheim's "two-foldness" more accurately described as bi-focalism?

There is a lively debate among visual theorists on this question of simultaneity (Gombrich 1960, pp. 4-5; Wollheim 1987, pp. 104-105 and p. 360; Podro 1991, p. 184) which, given the current emphasis in English teaching upon the reader's role in engaging with literature (Cox 1989), assumes a greater importance than that of an academic footnote. For what is again at issue is the nature of the reader's response, only this time the focus of attention is a painting. What I wish to argue is that it is plausible to describe the reader's/ viewer's response to the represented image in terms of the "bisociated mind" (Koestler 1975, p. 303) of the spectator, operating on the continuum of detachment and involvement as outlined in my discussion of the secondary world (Benton 1983; Benton and Fox 1985). In effect, this is a middle position between that of Gombrich and Wollheim. The former denies the possibility of simultaneity, arguing on the basis of the well known figure-ground reversals (duck/ rabbit; vase/ faces; young woman with a plumed hat/ old woman with a shawl), that the viewer's attention alternates and that it is literally inconceivable to focus on both elements together. Where paintings are concerned this leads him to assume, in Michael Podro's words, that "there's a psychological incompatibility between seeing the actual surface and seeing the scene depicted on it" (Podro 1991, p. 184). Wollheim, on the other hand, insists upon the unitary nature of "two-foldness" as fundamental to visual competence; surface and scene are essentially part of the same phenomenon of aesthetic viewing. Yet, while it is easy to counter Gombrich's reliance upon figure-ground reversals because they comprise two homogeneous images, rather than the heterogeneity of surface and scene, it is unconvincing in the light of common experience to wrap up both aspects in a single enclosing concept which denies the mobility of imaginative participation and the variability of attention that the viewer customarily exhibits before a work of art.

Wollheim's two-foldness is that of the "ideal viewer", rather similar to the "ideal reader" who has appeared in literary theory from time to time (Culler 1975). By contrast, what real readers/ viewers do is to adopt a rather more pragmatic, maybe cavalier, role. Diane Collinson (1985, pp. 271-274) puts herself engagingly into the shoes of "the ordinary spectator" strolling through an art gallery and invents a typical thought-track as a way of disentangling the elements that go to make up the aesthetic experience of viewing paintings. In a passage that recalls Iser's "indeterminacy gaps" (1978, pp. 170-179), Rosenblatt's concept of "evocation" (1978; 1985, p. 39), and my methodological notion of "introspective recall" (Benton 1988, p. 26), Collinson says:

> Perhaps aesthetic experience is even better typified by the gaps between "the ordinary spectator's" phrases; by the wordless moments when the spectator is poised in the act simply of apprehending the painting rather than when remarking on it. Indeed, if we think back to the remark "Ah, that sunlit field", it is the "Ah" more than "that sunlit field" that reveals the sensuous immediacy of the aesthetic moment. For it is not an experience in which we formulate an intellectual judgement to the effect *that* a vision of a sunlit field has been wondrously depicted. Rather, we experience the vision for ourselves; we are admitted to the painter's point of view. It is a distinguishing mark of aesthetic experience that it is one of participating in, or inhabiting, the world of the picture. Most of the comments or remarks indicative of the experience are retrospective in that they are *about* it rather than a part *of* it.

This account seems to be consistent with the responses that the students display in the following pages. It invites us to consider aesthetic experience as "participating in .... the world of the picture" and, in so doing, adopts a stance for the viewer which is comparable to that of the reader who chooses to enter the secondary world of fiction. We can become "lost" in a painting as we can in a poem or story in the sense that we become absorbed *for a time* in the "world" that is to be explored; but, as with fiction, absorption is a variable quality not a stable state and, sooner or later, the mind becomes more alert to the linguistic character of a text or the marked surface of a painting and, consequently, less to the invented world that is portrayed through these verbal and visual media. Moments later, the reader/ viewer may become re-absorbed, and so continue to shuttle to and fro along what

"Coming from Evening Church" by Samuel Palmer
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was termed earlier "the plane of psychic distance", experiencing varying degrees of involvement in and detachment from the world depicted in the work of art and varying degrees of critical or analytical insight into the ways in which the work is constituted.

Talking about a Painting : "Coming From Evening Church" by Samuel Palmer

(Note: I am grateful to Maggie Miller of Hounsdown School, Nr. Southampton, for the field work and transcripts upon which this section is based.)

Let us now eavesdrop upon these characteristics of representation and response in practice. Two sixteen year old GCSE students, Sarah and Susie, are looking at a colour slide of Samuel Palmer's painting, "Coming From Evening Church" (1830). They had been told nothing about Palmer nor seen any of his paintings before. The picture dates from his Shoreham years and is described by Raymond Lister (1985, plate 20) as "... one of Palmer's most numinous works, a vesper hymn in paint".

The students spent a few minutes looking and silently formulating their own first impressions in note form. Then they decided to discuss their responses, adding to their notes where appropriate. The following sequence of extracts from this collaborative activity shows them moving in and out of the world of the painting, interpreting both details and the overall theme and, in these first exchanges, orientating themselves in relation to what we can call "the implied viewer".

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Extract I

Su. (writing) We decided the sun was setting in the viewer's position

Sa. Behind the painter

Su. In the audience's .... yeah, behind the painter .... even though he's dead ....

Sa. to project the red colour

Su. Whereas the moon was rising

Sa. I said the overall painting is reddish and the moon is full and low in the sky

Su. I said it was earthy colours like really sort of rich red, yellow, green and brown. It's a real sort of harmony of earthy colours, isn't it?

Sa. Yeah, it's very natural

Su. But you're sort of like misled by the naturalness of it, the colouring because it looks unnatural when you look at the detail of, like, the hills .... they look very unnatural don't they? Sort of humpety bumpety, humpety bumpety

Sa. Yeah

Su. Like bubbles and the houses .... see that house there - it looks sort of fat doesn't it? Fat and round and homely and you'd never, sort of, see houses like that around would you? It's quite an old painting isn't it? .... looking at their dress .... isn't it?

The first three utterances suggest the position of the implied viewer in complementary ways : Susie is conscious of her spectator role and talks in terms of the "viewer" and the "audience" and seems to have some difficulty in detaching herself from this immediacy to concede Sarah's description that the sunlight must be assumed to come from "behind the painter" - "even", as Susie says, "though he's dead"! As they quickly realise, the light is a mixture of the dying sun and the rising moon, and this creates both an unearthly atmosphere and an ambiguous feeling when you inspect the details; as the girls put it, they are both "natural" and "unnatural". It is this strange luminosity together with the arching trees that lead them a few moments later to identify the overall theme of the painting.

Extract 2

Su. It's got to be a sort of mega religious intentions, hasn't it? ... the way it's sort of a harmony of earthy colours and the way it's framed by those two trees up in the corner .... They have them in the church so that, like, as you're walking into the church and saying how holy and earthy people we are ... sort of thing .... What are you going to say now?

Sa. I was going to say the impression projected is religious and homely.

The light, the "harmony of earthy colours", the tall Blakean trees that act as a frame within a frame all point to the "religious and homely" atmosphere that Sarah jots down in her notes. There is an interesting shift of perspective, too, in the middle of Susie's remarks : when she first mentions the two framing trees she is clearly referring to the composition of the painting; her later comments indicate that in her mind's eye she has transferred the schematic outline of the framing arch into the conventional doorway arch of the traditional church. The metaphoric power of Palmer's painting is clearly evident here in her response, encouraged, no doubt, by the effect of the intricate leaf patterns where the trees meet to form the rough, cusped arch.

During the next few minutes they are note-making and discussing details of the "ivy creeping everywhere" and the appearance of the hills, until they come to focus on the portrayal of the people. They agree about the sense of community but disagree about the technique of painting the faces of the individual figures.

Extract 3

Su. (Writing) The painting is ... portraying people as harmonious ... by walking in procession together and symbolising community.

Sa. Yeah

Su. And it's really effective in that way isn't it? And then, because they symbolise community life, it's framed by the woodlands, by the elements, by the sky, the wood, by nature ... nature.... I think the background for these people represents nature because it's so sort of naturally coloured and naturally textured and convincing

Sa. Yeah

Su. So idyllic ... idyllic ...?

Sa. Idealistic

Su. Idealistic ... and they're sort of framed at the end by these lovely trees. There's not much detail in their faces is there?

Sa. No, that's because the paint is so thick; (you) can't see the details in thick paint.

Su. I know, but like, perhaps it's significant that they don't have any sort of fine features in their faces because everyone's got ... you know, when you're painting people you always want to put the eyes and the nose and the mouth to sort of like pick out the individuals, but because they don't want to pick out individuals they want to represent ... anybody rather than somebody. (Pause) I'm going to put something down about the faces because I think that's significant.

Sa. What? About ... they've haven't really got any ....

Su. H'mm

Sa. I don't think it is ... because I just think it's the technique of the painter ....

Su. Look, you know when you're painting a picture ... you start thinking of what everything you do represents and what you're trying to tell your audience ... you're trying to prove to your audience ....

Sa. Yeah, I know but the paint he's chosen means that the ... his faces aren't very big, I mean he's got eyes and mouth but he's not trying to make them look like anyone.

Su. No, he's just got the sort of like, fundamental things about people.

Sa. Yeah, but he's not trying to make them look like anybody so it doesn't matter, he doesn't want them to look like people because they're not specific people - it's just a community of faces.

In commenting upon the serpentine procession of figures that takes the eye into the picture and leads it to the central icon of the church, the students do not focus upon this formal element *per se* but upon its symbolic significance. Susie's first two utterances extend her line of thinking in the previous extract and suggest that she has sensed the way the composition situates the actual church within "the church of nature". There is a two stage shift in the spectator's viewpoint : as we look at the leading couple in the procession pausing, as it were, under the arched doorway of the church of nature, the eye is then led along the processional aisle of the path they tread and up to the doorway of the actual church, situated in the elevated position of a natural altar, behind which the illuminated hills, the sky and the rising moon provide a dramatic backdrop like a stained glass window. The symbolism and composition are perfectly harmonised : each of the girls' adjectives, "idyllic" and "idealistic", seems appropriate.

The discussion then turns to the absence of detail in the way the faces of the people have been painted. Representation and response are intimately related in these interchanges. Susie's concern is with the significance and intention of this aspect of representation; Sarah's approach is more painterly and alert to the constraints of technique and materials that the artist is using. Together they show an awareness of both the depicted scene and the marked surface as parts of a unified response to the painting, as their final remarks make clear. This is Wollheim's "seeing-in" in action; "two-foldness" is evident in Sarah's comments about "the paint he's chosen" and "a community of faces" in her final two utterances.

Near the end of their discussion the students concentrate upon the buildings, particularly the church.

Extract 4

Su. Hey .... that church being in the centre of the painting is very significant, isn't it? ... which ... and like, there's a white light ....

Sa. Yeah, but it's very hidden by that house ....

Su. Yeah, I mean the spire ... it's very white and it's very late in the evening isn't it?

Sa. That's because it's the highest isn't it?

Su. Yes, but it's very significant looking because if you look at it, it's very dead in the centre isn't it?

Sa. The lines of the construction are very .... Looking at the slide close up.

Su. What's this building here?

Sa. That's the rest of the church.

Su. No, it isn't.

Sa. Yes, it is.

Su. Can you see this? There's a roof .... I'll show you ... it's like this ....

Sa. Is that a tree?

Su. Another church? a sort of dome on the top ... like the ....

Sa. Could just be a tree.

Su. That? A tree?

Sa. Yeah, yeah ... look that's a tree.

Su. No it isn't, that's a building isn't it? Or another tree ... yeah. That's not a tree at all.

Sa. It's not green, it's a brown tree ... it's a round tree.

Again, the personal style of each student is apparent as, characteristically, Susie begins to interpret the significance of the central position of the spire, while Sarah comments upon the technical construction of the image. They become understandably puzzled about just which of the depicted buildings are parts of the church. The group of steeply-gabled roofs, one with a sort of domed top as Susie remarks, contrast markedly with the elongated spire which breaks the soft lines of the similarly domed hills behind.

Full Text Provided by ERIC

Palmer's overriding concern here with the composition of shapes rather than precise detail has the effect of drawing the viewers into a close scrutiny of this aspect of the image: is it a village building, a tree, the rest of the church or another church altogether? The issue remains inconclusive just as the painting is indefinite; yet, there is no sense of frustration in the girls' remarks, rather a tacit understanding of the conventions of this sort of painting where the achievement of compositional harmony to express Palmer's pastoral vision is more important than fine detail.

As a means of making a final statement after this collaborative looking, talking and note-making, the students were invited to sketch an outline of the picture in the centre of the page and to arrange their comments on the light, the natural detail, colours, people, and shapes around their sketch (Benton M and P 1990, p. 53). This task enabled them to summarise their main ideas, an activity which learners do not often do naturally for themselves. It was not only useful but enjoyable and provided a satisfying closure to their experience of Samuel Palmer's painting.

Three Phases of Looking

In exploring some theoretical approaches to representation and response and observing how they work out in practice, we have essentially been asking three questions:

- What happens to your eye?
- What happens behind your eye?
- What happens beyond your eye?

The first concerns the viewer's perception of a painting, the means by which this object of contemplation is taken in. The second concerns the viewer's conception of a painting, the means by which it becomes lodged within the mind when the individual has taken possession of it. The third concerns the viewer's construction of meaning, the way in which an interpretation is formulated. Each takes us progressively further into the experience of looking at a painting. The process is not unlike that of coming to terms with a poem. Indeed, not only are there many historical links between these "sister arts" (Hagstrum 1958) but there are also many correspondences in contemporary literary and visual theory. A few of these connections are offered as a tentative conclusion.

Central to the idea of representation is the ubiquitous "conceptual image". Gombrich (1960, p. 76) points out that all art originates in the human mind; it is conceptual, not something "out there" in the visible world. This phenomenon is most easily seen in children's drawings, which are typically remote from representation, "because children draw what they know and not what they see". He develops the notion of the conceptual image in terms that complement those of Iser and Rosenblatt:

> ... the painter relies on our readiness to take hints, to read contexts, and to call up our conceptual image under his guidance. The blob in the painting by Manet which stands for a horse ... (is) so cleverly construed that it evokes the image in us - provided, of course, we collaborate. (Gombrich 1960, p. 10)

There are three particular features of this collaboration between the reader / viewer and the poem / painting that are worth stressing, each of which relates, respectively, to one of the three key questions discussed above. The first, illuminating the viewer's perception, is what Gombrich calls "guided projection" and it finds its complement in Louise Rosenblatt's insistence that "aesthetic reading" must honour the uniqueness of both the reader and the text. Speaking of impressionist painting, Gombrich says that

> ... the beholder must mobilise his memory of the visible world and project it into the mosaic of strokes and dabs on the canvas before him. It is here, therefore, that the principle of guided projection reaches its climax. The image, it might be said, has no firm anchorage left on the canvas ... it is only conjured up in our minds. The willing beholder responds to the artist's suggestion because he enjoys the transformation that occurs in front of his eyes .... The artist gives the beholder increasingly "more to do", he draws him into the magic circle of creation and allows him to experience something of the thrill of "making" .... (p.169)

Rosenblatt (1970, p. 113), similarly, says that "every time a reader experiences a work of art, it is in a sense created anew". Sarah and Susie, too, show us, particularly in extracts 1 and 2, where they discuss the houses and the church, that re-creative reading involves making a synthesis of those elements within the reader's/ viewer's own nature and those aspects of experience to which the text/ painting actually refers.

Secondly, as in painting so in literature, the work of art contains "indeterminancy gaps" (Iser) or "incomplete images" (Gombrich) which, for readers/ viewers, become spaces which we are required to fill. We feel the presence even of features we do not see. The incompleteness of Palmer's depiction of one of the shapes leads to some lively exchanges between the two students about what they are looking at, as we have seen in extract 4. What we observe here is the two viewers' struggle with the second phase of looking outlined above - their efforts towards a conception of this detail. The pressure to complete their conception of that area of the painting is dictated by the degree of indeterminacy in the image. There are similar structured gaps in literary texts that, as Iser shows, draw the readers in and call upon them, in Barthes' sense, to become "writers" - composers of their own virtual texts in response to the actual one.

Thirdly, crucial to the process of synthesising all the diverse details and perspectives we experience when coming to terms with a text or painting, is the operation of what Iser (1978, p. 119) calls the "wandering viewpoint", which is seen not only as a means of describing the way in which the reader is present in the text, but also as fundamental to the third phase of reading paintings and poems - the construction of meaning. Moreover, Gombrich's influence in theorising this aspect of aesthetic experience is acknowledged by Iser and invites us to extend its application into how we interpret visual as well as verbal art. Iser writes:

> Here we have one of the basic elements of the reading process: the wandering viewpoint divides the text up with interacting structures, and these give rise to a grouping activity that is fundamental to the grasping of a text.

> The nature of this process is shown clearly by a remark of Gombrich's: "In the reading of images, as in the hearing of speech, ... it is the guess of the beholder that tests the medley of forms and colours for coherent meaning, crystallising it into shape when a consistent interpretation has been found". (p. 119)

The "grouping activity" which Iser mentions is supported by references to Frank Smith's *Understanding Reading* (1971), thus further aligning the ways in which readers and viewers make meaning. We have seen something of this procedure in the "wandering viewpoint" of the two students as, for example, they move from colours, to the shape of the hills, to the house, to the dress of the people, all within a few utterances (extract 1).

When we try to tease out the components that go to make up a unified process in order to understand that process better, there is always the danger that the parts do not add up to whole. Particularly in this area of aesthetic response to represented images, the three phases of perception, conception and construction of meaning may not cover that elusive but nonetheless real sense of delight that expresses and confirms the viewers' feeling of aesthetic pleasure. Diane Collinson's remarks quoted earlier suggest the same idea; so do Susie's comments, at the end of the taped discussion, when the students are reviewing their responses to Samuel Palmer's painting:

> It seems to be in a valley because of these huge hills and these hills make me laugh, they're like bubbles ... so sort of unrealistic. And the way it's sort of framed ....

Her enjoyment of the whole experience of looking at the painting is evident. Visual pleasure clearly derives from the interplay of exploring a recognizable scene and appreciating the artifice with which that scene is represented.

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